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# **Olive Schreiner & Company: Schreiner's Letters and 'Drinking in the External World'**

**(ed) Liz Stanley**

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## ABSTRACTS

### **Introduction: Olive Schreiner & Company: Schreiner's Letters and 'Drinking In the External World' - Liz Stanley**

The Olive Schreiner Letters Project is outlined and its conceptual and methodological toolkit overviewed. A sea-change in Schreiner's life as well as her letter-writing practices is discussed. Theoretical and methodological ideas developed by the Project are sketched out, including the epistolarium; the epistolary gift and interrupted presence; letterness; epistolary transition zones, transitional forms and counter-epistolaria; the purposefulness and 'performativity' in the JL Austin sense of Schreiner's letters; editorship and the translation and transmutation of the epistolary form; the interface of Schreiner's letters with her other 'on the page' and off the page' activities; Schreiner's face-to-face networks and interconnecting epistolariums. Some initial ideas about Schreiner's letter-writing overall are also developed.

### **Olive Schreiner, 'A Returned South African', Her Letters, Her Essays, Her Fiction, Her Politics, Her Life: The Epistolarium Revisited – Liz Stanley**

A complex relationship exists between the epistolarium and the rest of someone's life and activities. Schreiner's 1889 return to South Africa changed her letter-writing, and also her mode of living. Relatedly she engaged in 'a project' around her 'A Returned South African' essays, with the manuscript of the first demonstrating her radically social constructionist thinking about 'race'. However, this is absent from her letters, so how should the relationship between these forms of writing be understood? A related example is that Schreiner is known to have had friendly relationships with many black leaders and politicians, but they are largely absent from her correspondences, so how to understand this also arises. The Schreiner epistolarium in a composed textual landscape having a complex relationship with the life of mind, other genres of writing, and the everyday world of meeting and talking. After 1889, Schreiner's letters are not about self-fashioning, but instead concern the crafting of a 'we', a self-and-other epistolary relationship, and working through this to help bring into being a changed better world in the future. Grasping this in Schreiner's case requires a sense of a whole, of the joined up nature of her life and array of activities, rather than treating her letter-writing as separate.

## **Re-Readings of Olive Schreiner's Letters to Karl Pearson: Against Closure - Helen Dampier**

While letters have sometimes been assumed to be 'private' life writing, and certainly many of Olive Schreiner's letters have been read in this way, her letters in fact trouble any simple binary notions of public and private. In fact the personal and the public are interwoven in many letters, as well as in 'lived life', with important implications for readings which assume the essentially 'personal' or 'private' nature of letters. This paper offers a re-reading of Schreiner's letters to the statistician and founder of the Men and Women's Club, Karl Pearson, drawing on analytical ideas developed by the Olive Schreiner Letters Project and outlined in the Introduction to this set of essays. I argue that the dominant, indeed the only, reading that has been made of these letters is as 'unrequited love letters' and that this needs rethinking, for when these letters are considered in their entirety rather than through the highly selective extracts used by most researchers, when they are contextualised as part of Schreiner's wider extant manuscript letters, and when the intertwining of their 'public' and 'private' aspects is recognised, it becomes clear that a considerably more complex interpretation of her letters is required. This paper considers how Schreiner's letters to Pearson have been read to date, what differences arise from re-reading the letters 'in whole' and 'in context', and what the implications of this are for reading letters more generally.

## **'Dear Ones!' Multiple Addressees and Epistolary Relationships In A Findlay Family Letter - Andrea Salter**

This paper examines the ways in which complex real-world/epistolary relationships are represented and managed in the Schreiner-Findlay family network. It focuses on one particular letter from the Findlay Family Collection, written in June 1898 by Katie Stuart (one of Olive Schreiner's nieces) to 'Dear Ones!' (unnamed family members). The letter concerns a visit she and Theo Schreiner (her uncle) made to Katie Findlay (her mother), who was then living in a mental health institution. Drawing on the idea of an 'epistolarium' encompassing both referential and textual dimensions of letters and letter-writing, the implications of three different ways of reading the multiply-addressed 'Dear Ones!' letter are discussed: (1) as a referential account of Katie Findlay and her circumstances; (2) for its rhetorical features, including its construction of a viewpoint and persona for Stuart as letter-writer; and, (3) regarding how some Olive Schreiner letters comment on Stuart, to consider how the 'dear ones' may have interpreted the letter at the time. The conduct of

relationships around an interrupted presence (rather than more permanent absence) characterises the maintenance of family relations in the Schreiner-Findlay family epistolary network. The three ways of reading the letter help understand Stuart's positioning in the family network, but also spotlighting just one letter inhibits investigation of wider structures and themes across the epistolarium more broadly.

### **“I Am Too Much Shut In With the Personal”: Representations of Public Love and Private Death in the Case of Amy Levy - Donna Hetherington**

This paper brings together a number of historical documents for analysis, such as letters, obituaries and poetry, to explore a particular event and how it reverberated within and across the different texts. The event in question is the death of the poet and writer Amy Levy in 1889, who Levy being a friend of Olive Schreiner and part of the network of women writers in 1880s London with which my broader research is concerned. I am therefore interested to consider how Levy's death and life was perceived and refracted through such texts, both at the time and also more recently. In order to do so, I draw on some ideas integral to the Olive Schreiner Letters Project, such as the epistolarium and considering letters in relation to the concept of the gift. Also, with regards networks and epistolariums, I investigate notions of interconnectedness and boundaries which can be seen to be porous and complicated. I also look at notions of absence regarding lost and last letters, how these are in part recoverable in other documents, and what they might show regarding disruptions, challenges and negations within the network. Overall the paper demonstrates the value of closely re-reading historical documents in relation to each other, intertextually. And, importantly for Schreiner scholarship, doing so shows this event as a marker of a shift from Levy being 'too much shut up in the personal' to Schreiner's post-1889 emphasis on the external material world and her preferred epistolary mode of a concern with 'objective things'.

### **“That Is Supposed To Be My Foot”: Letters, Bodies and Epistolary Co-Presence - Sarah Poustie**

The assumption that physical absence and geographical separation are prerequisites for letter-writing is prevalent in much although not all epistolary theory. This paper is concerned with the metaphysics of presence and how (and why) the bodily trace is inscribed in letters and other epistolary material, even in cases when the writer and addressee are physically co-present. This argument is

developed around everyday epistolary examples written over varying degrees of temporal and spatial separation from their intended addressee, by people who were lesser or greater presences within Olive Schreiner's interconnected epistolary networks. The concept of the 'epistolarium' sees epistolary exchanges as influenced by the perspectives of the letter-writer and addressee in their particular socio-historical contexts and personal circumstances. The paper draws upon the concept of the epistolarium and uses the idea of 'letterness' to discuss examples that draw upon or play with broadly established conventional, theoretical and conceptual features of letters in working to inscribe a sense of physical presence. Considering letters from the perspectives of those involved in the epistolary exchange can offer nuanced conceptual insights into such things as reciprocity, absence and presence, in drawing upon the letter-writer's and addressee's expressed beliefs, relationship, knowledge of and feelings towards each other. As the examples suggest, the inscription of the bodily trace is a strategic device employed by letter-writers to reaffirm presence and relationship in given circumstances and even in instances of physical co-presence.

## Introduction - Olive Schreiner & Company: Schreiner's Letters and 'Drinking In the External World'

Liz Stanley, University of Edinburgh

### Olive Schreiner and the Schreiner Letters Project

The South African feminist writer and social theorist Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) is now best known as novelist, although in her life-time she was equally well-known as a political essayist and social commentator. A voluminous letter-writer, at her death probably around 20,000 of Schreiner's letters were extant, with most of them retrieved and destroyed by her estranged husband Samuel (Cron) Cronwright-Schreiner.<sup>1</sup> However, some 5000+ letters survive and are located in a range of archival sources, consisting mainly of letters he had not known about or which their addressees had refused to give to him.<sup>2</sup>

There are three existing published collections of Schreiner letters (Cronwright-Schreiner 1924, Rive 1987, Draznin 1992). Cronwright-Schreiner 1924's *The Letters of Olive Schreiner* is bowdlerised, highly

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<sup>1</sup> Schreiner destroyed letters people wrote to her, and at particular junctures asked her major correspondents to destroy her letters to them. This was partly because she was concerned that a market in buying and selling her letters might happen after she died, in part to protect her privacy and theirs, but was mainly because she did not approve of 'biographising' – she insisted that what was important was the work that people did, that such work was always a collective matter, and the personalities and details of the lives of particular 'famous' people were irrelevant individualising.

<sup>2</sup> For many of Schreiner's close friend and families, Cronwright's 'biographising' was both a personal betrayal of her known wishes, and also a cashing in on the posthumous market for all things Schreiner.



selective and deficient at a basic level with many of its ‘letters’ having been whittled down to small snippets of extracts and also often transcribed inaccurately as well (Stanley and Salter 2009). Rive’s *Olive Schreiner Letters* provides a better coverage of correspondences and transcriptions, but his versions are often careless, and sometimes more extended notations than accurate transcriptions, while his collection only goes up to 1899 because his early death meant a planned second volume was not carried out. Draznin’s *My Other Self* is exemplary for the point in time this collection of the Schreiner-Havelock Ellis correspondence was published, although her versions of both Ellis’s drafts and Schreiner’s letters are still smoothed for readers by not detailing omissions and so forth, and also this is an edition containing an actually atypical set of Schreiner letters – those to Ellis, in particular in the 1880s, are unlike those to anyone else (for reasons Draznin helpfully discusses and explains in her Introduction). Overall, only about 800-900 of the approximately 5000+ now extant Schreiner letters are available in published form in these collections, with the majority of them published in a seriously deficient version, many in a drastically shortened or bowdlerised form, containing multiple inaccuracies. Also, the correspondents included and the selections of letters in these collections fail to convey who Schreiner’s main correspondents are and which are her most important letters, as comparison with the major addressees and ‘shape’ of her extant letters overall – something which the Olive Schreiner Letters Project is doing – shows..

The Olive Schreiner Letters Project is funded by the UK’s ESRC (RES-062-23-1286). It is interdisciplinary, multi-site and has a three-pronged approach: to research the letters and publish from this; to publish the total

extant Schreiner letters in a best-practice electronic form; and also develop a Virtual Research Environment or VRE and encourage other text-based projects – concerned with letters, diaries, autobiographies, fieldnotes, active documents, photographs, voice recordings and so on - to make similar use of the excellent research opportunities and capabilities provided by custom-designed electronic media

(<http://www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk/index.html>). The Project will publish the complete extant Schreiner letters, all 5000+ of them, in a transcribed form in a fully searchable online edition. This goes live in January 2012 and from that date on can be accessed at [www.oliveschreiner.org](http://www.oliveschreiner.org) Schreiner's letters range from a few hundred words to forty or so closely written pages, so the result is fairly massive. Project transcriptions are detailed and faithful to the manuscript letters, in the sense that all insertions, deletions and also 'mistakes' of the bird in flight kind that characterises many letters are fully included. The online edition will be accompanied by a sophisticated user-interface with full Boolean search capabilities, supported by a raft of other research aids for users and readers.

In addition to focusing on Schreiner's letters and other writings, the Project is exploring aspects of the wider epistolary and other networks she was involved in, as a protagonist or as a minor or peripheral participant. One of these explorations is an in-depth focus on 'Schreiner and Company' in 1880s London, dealing with a specific time-period and a particular network, located in space as well as time, and centrally concerned with 'the city' as it was lived, walked, discussed, represented in the writing and other work of a network of Schreiner's friends and acquaintances, including Amy Levy,

Vernon Lee, Eleanor Marx and others. The other is an equally in-depth investigation of the wider networks of some of Schreiner's correspondents over the period 1880s to 1920, focusing on some very different kinds of networks, and centrally concerned with the complexities of 'letterness'. This will include some small-scale examples regarding Aletta Jacobs as a conduit for letter-exchanges, the networks of the Men and Women's Club, and the epistolary friendship between Edward Carpenter and Constance Lytton. It will also feature larger interconnected case studies concerning Schreiner's place in a wider family letter-writing network, the role that letters of different kinds played in relation to pivotal political event of 1895/6 concerning the Jameson Raid in South Africa, and also Schreiner and other women correspondents in the epistolary networks of the politician Jan Smuts.

More information will be found on these and other activities on the Project website ([www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk](http://www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk)), which also provides details of Project publications and downloadable versions of many of them.

### **“Drinking in the External World”**

In a letter of 25 April 1890 to Havelock Ellis, Olive Schreiner wrote that:

“... I seem to drink in the external world through every little pore. Never before, never when I was a child, have I been able to live such an objective life, a life in which I feel not the least wish to give out to express, seem conscious of nothing but an alpowerful desire to drink in through my senses... I suppose it is after these long, long years buried in abstract thought, in a way which even you have not understood, that I turn with such a keen kind of relish to the external world... I have the same kind of feeling to objective things that a person has to ^solid^ food who has been ill for months and begins to eat again, it is something quite different from ordinary hunger. My

nature craves it. ...” (OS to Havelock Ellis, 25 April 1890, Texas; Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription)

This was written soon after Schreiner’s return to South Africa at the end of 1889, as one of the most famous women of the age following publication of *The Story of An African Farm* in 1883. She wrote what she did in this letter to Ellis around a sea-change in her epistolary practices, a related change in her writing practices more generally, and also, as the letter conveys, in her manner of living too. While living in Europe from 1881 on, Schreiner had oscillated between living a very sociable life, one which also involved her providing financial and others kinds of support for many of the people who contacted her for help with problems in their lives; and living in a more sequestered way while engaged in intensively writing. However, Schreiner’s letters after her late 1889 return to South Africa are characterised by what can be seen as an attentive measured civility.

Schreiner’s attentive measured civility involved her engaging with the external world of materialities, both mundane and momentous, with this shaping and containing the kind of subjectivity which Schreiner commented had damaged both the political engagements and the lived lives of members of the feminist and socialist networks she had been part of in Britain. However, ‘containing’ here does not mean that Schreiner’s letters exclude or suppress the inter-personal, but rather that they combine placing silent brackets around the more emotive aspects of personal relationships, invoking emotion through rhetorical devices shared with her closest correspondents (with, for instance, Schreiner’s frequent use of the phrase ‘great is silence’ being a typical means of indicating closure), and formulating epistolary

exchanges mainly around engaging with external political concerns and issues. Consequently the ‘measured’ aspect of her letters indicates carefulness and also an agreed unit of exchange (regarding the kind of letters they would write to each other and the kind of content they would have) between her and her correspondents, while their ‘civility’ invokes notions of what is right and proper, and ‘attentive’ signifies that none of this disbarred close loving relationships between the people concerned. Interestingly, then, Schreiner’s letters lack ‘sensitivity’ in the usual sense of the term because they are not concerned with writing about feelings, and consequently they raise interesting questions about whether their status is actually that of personal letters, for the familiar here is strictly bounded and governed and focused outward to the world of materiality and events.

### **The Theoretical Framework of the Olive Schreiner Letters Project**

Various aspects of the Project’s conceptual and theoretical framework are addressed and utilised in the papers which follow this Introduction. The main conceptual tools informing its work are briefly sketched out here as a preface to the papers themselves. More information on all of them will be found at <http://www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk/TeamPublications.html> where the majority of Project publications can also be downloaded.

**The epistolarium:** The core concept for the Project’s work is the concept of ‘the epistolarium’ with its perspectival, dialogical, emergent, temporal and serial aspects; and all the contributions to this Working Paper contribute to expanding and enhancing Project thinking on this.

**The epistolary gift and interrupted presence:** Building on the idea of the epistolarium, the Project conceptualises letters, and epistolarity more generally, around ideas about ‘the gift’, involving complex patterns of reciprocity in epistolary exchanges which are part of maintaining the fabric of social life. Relatedly, it sees most epistolary exchanges as predicated on the continuation and maintenance of relationships around interrupted presence, rather than such exchanges occurring solely or mainly as a solution to absence. That is, most letters are about facilitating and/or maintaining relationships between people in routine contact and only temporarily apart. They cover and concern the interrupted co-presence of the people concerned, rather than being means of crossing more permanent absences, as with migrant letters between people permanently or semi-permanently separated from each other.

**Letterness:** In common with much other academic work on letters, the Project is exploring the shifting boundaries of ‘letterness’ and the porous boundaries between ‘the letter’ and cognate forms or genres, whilst also recognising that the fundamentals of the letter form are highly resilient.

**Epistolary transition zones, transitional forms and counter-epistolaria:**

At the same time, we are interested in the development over time in Schreiner’s letters of epistolary transition zones and transitional forms, and also a range of counter-epistolaria which trouble but do not break the centrality of the letter and its definitional elements. That is, ‘the letter’ is immensely porous, but at the same time there remains a definitional core without which a piece of writing is not longer a letter.

**The purposefulness and performativeness of Schreiner's letters :** At basis referential, Schreiner's letters are nearly always purposive and also frequently highly performative in the J.L. Austin (1962) sense of 'doing things with words', for her letters often 'do things' in themselves rather than just comment about them.<sup>3</sup>

**Editorship and the translation and transmutation of the epistolary form:**

While the Project strives to make its transcriptions of the Schreiner letters as full and accurate and 'to the letter' as possible, editorship has to be recognised as a particular kind of activity involving translation and the transmutation of letters from one form to another. It produces something which are less simulacra than transmogrified forms, and it is theorising this. In addition to our own editorial practices, we are also exploring how Schreiner's letters have been edited by others and the impact of this on understandings of Schreiner's life and writings as well as the letters themselves.

**The inter-relationship of Schreiner's letters with her other 'on the page'**

**and 'off the page' activities:** We are also interested in how Schreiner's letter-writing connects with her 'works', the writing that formed the bedrock of her activities. The Project among other things explores Schreiner's published writings, her political involvements and activities, and her everyday life and changing modes of living.

**Schreiner epistolary and face-to-face networks and interconnecting**

**epistolariums:** Letters are an inherently social and communicative medium

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<sup>3</sup> Austin's technical and focused notion of performativity is very different from Judith Butler's more loser ideas about performance.

of exchange, and Schreiner's very different ways of writing letters to particular addressees has to be taken into account. Most of these people were also themselves engaged as letter-writers, sometimes to a large array of people, including outwith their connections with Schreiner herself. Such interconnecting networks are being explored as part of the Project's concerns.

### **Schreiner's Letter-Writing**

The Project overall is interested in Schreiner's letter-writing practices and the ways in which even just one of her letters can include different kinds of writing practices. Preliminary analysis suggests that the main kinds of writing practices that mark her letters involve: commonplace and 'business' quotidian letter-writing; family and friendship affectional letter-writing; comradely 'republic of like minds' letter-writing; introduction and brokerage letter-writing; and paraenetic, analytical and political engagement letter-writing (see here the discussion in <http://www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk/GiantRaceArticlePDF.pdf> for more detail). Also, again in a preliminary way, Schreiner's letter-writing is inter-related with quotidian and political emphases in her writing more generally and in her political activities, as indicted schematically in the Table below:



<b>The quotidian</b> everyday activities, the fabric of everyday life arrangements and ‘business’ letter-writing family and friendship affectional letter-writing comradely ‘republic of like minds’ letter-writing	= the everyday quotidian } } = the epistolary quotidian }
<b>The political</b> practical political activities letters of introduction and brokerage letters of paranaetic engagement formal un/published writings	= the political through material activities = the political by epistolary means = the political by epistolary means = the political by other textual means

Aspects of these kinds of letter-writing practices will be picked up across the papers which follow this Introduction. However, it is worth noting here that, if nothing else, what is in this Table will convey in a preliminary way how much Schreiner conceived herself and lived and wrote as someone deeply politically engaged in a number of overlapping senses of the word political. ‘Preliminary’ has been used here about both the letter-writing practices and the quotidian and the political aspects of Schreiner’s activities, because the detailed analysis part of the Project is still very much in progress, while eventually such ideas will be explored across the entire corpus of Schreiner letters and also concern those of other members of her epistolary and other networks too.

Reading the Schreiner letters by looking at their structural features overall, not just the nitty-gritty of their specific detail, is highly consequential for how such detail and the letters generally are understood. That is, attending to the structural aspects of her letter-writing does not mean ignoring the

detailed specific content, but instead relating this to the wider epistolary picture and building up this wider picture through working back and forth between it and detailed readings of specific letters or groups of letters. And this point links back to the Schreiner Letters Project's central concept of the epistolarium, for this emphasises the importance of the shape of the totality of her writing activities, and the contexts of this epistolary production, in conceptualising Schreiner's epistolary engagement with and responsiveness to other people and social circumstances. How it plays out regarding different aspects of Schreiner's letter-writing and also that of others in her epistolary and face-to-face networks, is explored in more detail in the papers following.

### **Acknowledgements**

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# **Olive Schreiner, ‘A Returned South African’, Her Letters, Her Essays, Her Fiction, Her Politics, Her Life: The Epistolarium Revisited**

**Liz Stanley, University of Edinburgh**

## **Introduction: To the Letter**

Working with whole letters, reading them together with all the other letters written by someone, and relating these letters to their contexts of writing, allows the wider shape of what someone who writes letters actually does across the corpus of their letter-writing to come into view; and this in turn encourages and enables us to think about the structural features of their letter-writing overall (Dampier, this volume). Doing this also points up the importance of thinking about ‘their letters’ in the round in all their complexities, something which the concept of the epistolarium (Stanley 2004, 2011) supports and extends. It does so because it takes into account all the different dimensions of someone’s letter-writing as emergent, perspectival, dialogical and serial, including - insofar as this is possible - what has been destroyed or lost as well as what is extant and accessible; and so the concept of the epistolarium provides the broader context for discussion in this essay.

In addition, in thinking about collections of letters there is almost always a rather large but often ignored ‘elephant in the corner’ which needs to be taken into account, and this is certainly so regarding the Olive Schreiner letters. An epistolarium, like the collections of letters composing it, has to be recognised as being as much characterised by absence as by presence. There

are many Olive Schreiner letters extant, but many more of them were written than now survive: probably around 20,000 letters were extant at her death, compared with the 5000+ now surviving, with there being an irrevocable absence here because an unknown quantity, but from his diary entries and letters perhaps some 15,000 or so, were destroyed by the busy Cronwright-Schreiner, Olive Schreiner's estranged husband, after preparing *The Life...* and *The Letters of Olive Schreiner* for publication. Also of course many more letters will have been written by Schreiner than were extant at her death, with everyday forms of attrition being the common fate of most letters. There is also absence in a more complex sense, that of unexpected absences from the content of Schreiner's extant letters concerning the things she did not write about. These are the things that are not present and written about in her letters when one might expect them to be, because other evidence suggests they loomed large in her life. There is another absence too, of never existing letters, where it might be expected that Schreiner would have been involved in epistolary exchanges with particular people, but in the event was not (for some examples of which, see Stanley & Dampier 2010a). The elephant in the epistolary corner, then, is composed by these two momentous and consequential absences

Thinking about Olive Schreiner's letters around these structural aspects requires attention to: the relationship of particular letters to other letters to the same person, and also in relation to the entirety of her surviving letters; everyday routine attritions and wholesale destructions of letters as common social practices; the (possible) existence of letters which may survive but are located in unknown hands; civilised epistolary silences that

are indicated in the extant letters but never filled; the shadows of might-have-been letters but which were in the event not written and/or not sent; and the relationship between Schreiner's writing in her extant letters and her other genres of writing. Thinking about such things raises important ontological and epistemological questions. What are the structures and dimensions of the Schreiner epistolarium when thought of in the round? How are Schreiner's different genres of writing related to her letters and to the Schreiner epistolarium? How does the Schreiner epistolarium give shape to a world ('real-world', and epistolary) and understand and represent its persons and events? How are the particular letter-writer and her addressees located within this and with what absences, silences and complexities? What is the relationship of the epistolarium and its bedrock aspects to the quotidian of the lived life and the material world?

These questions are explored in here, taking off from the 1889/1890 sea-change in Schreiner's letter-writing practices marked by her 25 April 1890 letter to Havelock Ellis and commented on in the Introduction to this collection of papers. This letter marks a transition point or epiphany when, influenced by Spinoza's meaning of the terms, Schreiner turned away from subjectivity and towards objectivity and the external world. In the following extended extract from her letter, she observes,

“...But some how just now I feel more fit for practical work travelling, climbing mountains &c I seem to drink in the external world through every little pore. Never before, never when I was a child, have I been able to live such an objective life, a life in which I feel not the least wish to give out to express, seem conscious of nothing but an alpowerful desire to drink in through my senses. I look & look at the skies & the bushes & & the men & the material things as if I was just new born, & was learning to know them. I suppose it is after these

long, long years buried in abstract thought, in a way which even you have not understood, that I turn with such a keen kind of ~~refle~~ relish to the external world. It's no use fighting against it whether it be good & great or not. I must be as I am. Oh how my eyes love to look at the world & feed on it. I have the same kind of feeling to objective things that a person has to ^solid^ food who has been ill for months & begins to eat again, it is something quite different from ordinary hunger. My nature craves it...." (OS to Havelock Ellis, 25 April 1890, Texas; Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription)<sup>4</sup>

The change remarked on here, of not 'giving out' and instead turning to 'the actual world' and 'material things', was not confined to Schreiner's letter-writing. It *does* concern her letters, but it also impacted on the other forms or genres of writing she produced too - her fiction writing, allegories, political essays, and also her open letters as well as her 'familiar' letters. It acted also as a marker for what became a mode of living, in which the emotionally intimate was rhetorically picked out and signalled in Schreiner's letters and at the same time circumscribed by using various bracketing devices, including use of the distanced third person singular, 'one', and such phrases as 'But great is silence' in order to intimate but not delineate, to bracket, something momentous happening in her personal life (Stanley 2002a). And the change following this 'turn with relish to the external world' marks Schreiner's letters, her other writings, her inter-personal and her political relationships, right through to the end of 1920 when she died.

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<sup>4</sup> All Project Transcriptions are precisely 'to the letter' and include the omissions, insertions, deletions, mistakes and so forth of the original.

## **‘A Returned South African’ and Her Letters**

The main sign of this major shift in writing and living was that after Schreiner’s late 1889 return to South Africa, she immediately engaged on a major project, which took the form of writing a set of essays conceived as a political as well as cultural intervention both in South Africa, where she rapidly established high-level networks after her return, and also in the imperial metropole. These essays were intended for a projected book, *Stray Thoughts on South Africa*, to be authored pseudonymously by ‘A Returned South African’.

Six of the planned essays appeared between 1891 and 1899 in international journals and magazines, published as ‘A Returned South African no. 1’, no. 2, no. 3 and so on. The thread that connects them is signalled in ‘A Returned South African no. 1’, entitled “South Africa, its natural features, its diverse peoples, its political status: the problem” and published in 1891 in the prestigious journal the *Nineteenth Century*. This thread concerns ‘race’ and Schreiner’s conception of it as something entirely plastic and socially constructed, with the particular composition of peoples and land in South Africa for her demonstrating its socially constructed character, with the consequences and reverberations of this worked out over the other essays in the series:

“To grasp our unique social condition ^more^ clearly, it will be well to take blank map of South Africa, & to pass over it first ^the entire map ... a layer ^coating^ of dark paint, lighter in the West, to represent the yellow tinted Bushmen, Hottentots & Half-cast, ^native races^ & darker, amounting up to the deepest black, in the ^extreme^ East, to represent the vast numbers of the black ^black-skinned^ Bantu



population ^to be found there.^ ... Looking at it ... No line can be drawn which will separate the colours one from another.

But not yet have we grasped the full complexity & difficulty of the ^our^ South African problem. ^question^ ... Not only do we ^do our^ ^the South Africans^ exist everywhere in superimposed layers of black & white... ^of different^ races ... but in our households, our families, & our very persons we are mingled mixed ^no longer longer ?mixed^ ^blended.^ There is probably not a white man's ^civilized^ roof in South Africa which covers people only of one nationality ...

We take a typical Cape household ... the father is an Englishman ^English,^ the mother half Dutch and half French Huguenot with a French name; ^the children share these nationalities;^ the governess is a German; the cook is a Mozambiquer, ^Zulu^, the housemaid half-Hottentot & half Dutch, the kitchen girl half Dutch & half slave, the stable boy a Kaffir, & the little nurse girl who waits at table a Bushgirl Basuto. This household is a type of thousands of others to be found everywhere throughout Africa ... the peoples of South Africa resemble the constituents ^ingredients^ of a pudding ... ^again to resort them is impossible however much we may wish it^ ^We can only go on further.^” (‘A Returned South African no. 1’; my transcription)<sup>5</sup>

As this long extract indicates, in the manuscript of her ‘A Returned South African no. 1’ essay Schreiner is thinking through three points in particular about ‘race’, in South Africa, but by implication elsewhere too, graphically shown by her manuscript workings-out rather than the tidied-up published version. She writes that, if a blank map is taken and red, blue, green and so used on to depict on it the presence of whites, coloured, Indian and the various African peoples of South Africa, there is nowhere that is just one colour. The blending involved, she emphasises, has also occurred at the micro level, in the mixtures of people in households, but also the mixtures in, as

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<sup>5</sup> As with Project transcriptions of the Schreiner letters, all manuscript transcriptions are precise and include the omissions, insertions, deletions, mistakes and so forth of the original. A ^signals^ her insertions, and a question-mark ?before a word signals a doubtful reading.

Schreiner puts it, “our very persons”. And this mixture involves a permeation of each other’s substance - by which she means mixed ‘race’ - to the extent that “We can only go on further”, as she concludes this passage.

What this transcribed extract from the ‘Returned South African no. 1’ manuscript with its many insertions and mistakes will have graphically conveyed is that Schreiner’s thinking about ‘race’ matters was emergent in the writing process itself, and this process was busy, engaged, thoughtful and intensive. Here the authorial ‘I’ makes direct personal address to readers, in a context of the writer’s geographical and/or political distance from them; it provides intimate personal detail, of the writer’s childhood, innermost feelings about race, and struggles to remake these; and it persuades, argues and requests a response, in the form of *a changed way of life*, - ‘we can only go on’ - rather than another written text in return. Indeed, not only the ‘Returned South African’ manuscripts but also Schreiner’s later editing of the published versions to craft her proposed book from them are similarly strongly characterised by the writing ‘I’ of the Returned South African herself and have similar letter-like characteristics. Also Schreiner’s political essays in addition to her ‘Returned South African’ ones – such as *The Political Situation* (1897), *An English South African’s View of the Situation* (1899), *Closer Union* (1909), *Woman and Labour* (1911), ‘The Dawn of Civilisation’ (1921) - have various features of letterness too. Indeed, letterness is in some ways a more marked feature of Schreiner’s published and unpublished writings than it is of her ‘actual letters’, which can often be more like political and intellectual essays, although problems in how the existing published editions of Schreiner letters have been selected and edited, as discussed in the

Introduction to this collection, have largely masked this from readers (Cronwright-Schreiner 1924, Rive 1987, Draznin 1992, see also Stanley & Salter 2009).

While writing her ‘Returned South African’ essays, from the start of 1890 to mid 1893 Schreiner lived alone in a very small up-country place in the Western Cape called Matjesfontein. While there, she worked intensively, and apart from occasional sporadic visits by close friends she almost entirely spent her time working on these essays and some other shorter writings. This was punctuated by bursts of letter-writing around the weekly arrival of the European post and its transport by rail up to Matjesfontein, on the main railway route between Cape Town and the north, together with travellers who stayed an hour or so for a meal before the train left; and it was punctuated also by short periods of great sociability when Schreiner went to Cape Town, and then letter-writing thereafter. But there is a conundrum about this. Over this period, most of Schreiner’s life and nearly all of her mind was immersed in her essays, followed by her letters. However, her letters over this two and a half year period to her closest friends and family, letters which presumptively are of a life and its concerns, contain almost nothing of the matters most engaging her. The few hints and glimpses about her writing which appear do so in just a small number of letters, as follows.

To her very close friend Mary Sauer, wife of the ‘Cape liberal’ politician J.W. Sauer, Schreiner wrote asking,

“Don’t mention to any one, dear, about my Cape Article, not my brother or Mr Fort or anyone knows I am writing it, & the fun will be to see if they guess, don’t even tell Mr Sauer, & we’ll see if he guesses. It’s a great relief to me working at it, it takes the strain off

purely creative work.” (OS to Mary Sauer, nd January 1891, NLSA; OSLP transcription)

A week or so later, Schreiner commented to a British friend Havelock Ellis, who at this time sometimes acted as an intermediary with publishers for her, that:

“I am working still at the South African article. It is almost a book. I am trying to trim it down to the limits of an article. Do you think the Nineteenth would give me forty pages? Its a fine article, & will be of intense interest describing our problem & leading men Rhodes &c

^Whoever you give the article to make them promise that they or rather let them understand that I retain the right of republishing the article in book form after two full months from its publication have passed.^” (OS to Havelock Ellis, 2 February 1891, Texas; OSLP transcription)

Then about a month after this, Schreiner wrote to Mary Sauer again, to tell her that

“I am coming down to Town ... I shall come down as soon as I have finished an article I am working at & which must go off by this ^next^ week’s mail to England. I am sitting up every night till two or three at my work, & feel tired, & shall be glad of change. I may come any time from Sunday to Wednesday...” (OS to Mary Sauer, nd March 1891, NLSA; OSLP transcription)

This was followed a week or so later by another letter to Mary Sauer, containing a little more detail about what she was writing, to the effect that:

“... I’ve been writing an article for the *unreadable* Fortnightly, A returned Colonialist view of South Africa. Of course & I won’t sign it & no one will know it as mine, they never suspect my newspaper articles are mine, but it’s hard to finish it, because when one has been careful to exclude the least reflection on anybody or thing one has great difficulty in producing an absolutely true picture. The only men I describe are Mr Sauer Sir Henry, Rhodes & old President Reitz, because I know I have sympathy enough with them all to do them justice. I would like to think that when I die that I had not set

one word down in all my writing which could cause pain to any human creature.” (OS to Mary Sauer, 24 March 1891, NLSA; OSLP transcription)

Tantalisingly suggestive though these comments are, however, the above four letter extracts are the *only* things Schreiner writes in her letters of this time about the momentous life of her mind that was occurring and her engrossed focused engagement with what she continued to see for the rest of her life as South Africa’s defining problem and the fundamental problem of the century ahead world-wide. Her 1890 to 1892 letters concern family and friendship matters, make arrangements to meet, pass on and request news and information and are generally ‘keeping in touch between meetings’ in character. But what her published work and remaining manuscripts show is that over the same time-period some momentous intellectual and political changes were taking place in how Schreiner thought about South Africa, race and racism, imperialism, war, the local state and its political system and more.

This gap between the momentous life of her mind as demonstrated in Schreiner’s un/published writings, and the somewhat distanced brief inscription of topics in her letters, has interesting implications for understanding notions of intimacy in relation to the highly permeable boundaries of public life and private life that characterised Schreiner’s mode of living as well as writing. And related to this, Schreiner’s ‘returning’ comments about white South Africans in letters to English friends comment about them being a nation bereft of an aristocracy of labour or blood and their inability to understand or engage with impersonal topics, so that she saw little point in writing about her impersonal interests to them. In her letters and her

essays, public and private interpenetrated (Stanley & Dampier 2011), and rhetorical configurations and expressions signifying intimacy were precisely that, rhetorical. There is also the rhetorical attentive measured civility of the epistolary ethics which Schreiner shared with her closest friends and correspondents to take into account in theorising her letters, for this defined their mutually arrived at practices regarding epistolary closeness and distance, such that ‘intimate’ detail seems to have been neither expected nor seen as appropriate in letter-exchanges between her and her closest correspondents. One important result is that there are silences in Schreiner’s letters about personal things which engaged her, for instance regarding her friendships with Amy Levy and Eleanor Marx (see Hetherington, this volume), and also the closeness of her friendship with Mary Sauer. As these points will suggest, assumptions often made about ‘the familiar letter’ need to be re-thought in Schreiner’s case.

There are also implications regarding the constitution and boundaries of the Schreiner epistolarium. That is, the ‘letter-likeness’ of her political essays, as compared with the in some senses ‘non letter-likeness’ of her actual letters, which have some of the features of formal public kinds of writing, have consequences for what is seen as inside and what as outside the Schreiner epistolarium. Thus, for instance, Schreiner’s many open letters, sent to newspapers and magazines regarding a wide range of public and political matters, certainly follow the conventional format of ‘the letter’ but are in other respects closer to the genre form of the essay or polemic. In addition, many of her ostensibly private and personal letters have strong paraenetic characteristics and are concerned with analysis, argument and the exposition

of ideas and positions, and again morph into other genres while retaining the outward appearance of the letter form. And relatedly, an interesting feature of Schreiner's published political essays is that their argumentation often makes use of personal and biographical examples, lending them a strong 'from the person' quality that is absent from many of her letters as such. Other questions flow from this, including: how should the relationship of Schreiner's letters to the life of her mind be comprehended? how to understand the relationship of her letters to the quotidian of face-to-face meetings between her and other people? And how to map such things onto her letter-writing and her other kinds of writing as well (Poustie, this volume)?

### **The Constancy of 'Race' In Schreiner's Published Writings and Life**

The constancy of a deep engagement with 'race' matters in Schreiner's writings and activities is well documented and undoubted (Stanley & Dampier 2010a, 2010b). However, this is little written about in the secondary literature, which focuses mainly on Schreiner's fiction and hardly at all on her political and 'race' writings. There is, however, a stream of her published writings from 1890 on which engaged with 'race' conceptually and also regarding its configuration in grounded political and economic circumstances, in the essays referenced earlier, in her open letters on such topics as segregation and trades unions and nationalism and race, and in her fictional works including her allegorical novella *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897) and posthumously-published novel *From Man to Man* (1926).

There are also many epistolary signs of Schreiner knowing, liking, and sharing political involvements with some important South African black leaders, including Solomon Plaatje, John Tengo Jabavu, Abdul Abdurahman and Mohandas Gandhi (discussed in detail in Stanley & Dampier 2010a). In addition, there are many traces in Schreiner's letters of her practical political involvements concerning a continuous stream of 'race' matters: in 1890-99 anti-Rhodes and imperial expansionism, 1894-5 black labour in the context of the South African state, 1896-7 massacres in Matabeleland and Mashonaland, 1905-7 imported Chinese labour, 1907-10 Indian citizenship rights, 1909-11 Union v. Federation, 1911-12 the so-called 'black peril', 1913 the Natives Land Acts, 1914-17 and 1919 South African Native National Congress delegations to Britain, 1920 Port Elizabeth strikes and Masabala trial, 1920 Bloemfontein women and passes.

Surprisingly, however, given the longevity of her involvement with such things and the many signs of her mutually respectful relationships with well-known black leaders, Schreiner's letters reveal little about this except for in passing comments in letters to people other than them, for there is a nearly total absence of letters to these black leaders themselves, with the exception of one to Abdul Abdurahman and one to Mohandas Gandhi:

"... Did I tell you of the educated Christian Kaffir [Jabavu] who came to see us the other day? I fancy I did ..." (OS to Betty Molteno, 16 December 1897, UCT; OSLP transcription)

"That scene in the house yesterday, was ... Contemptible ... And ... all the while there was Abdurahman's drawn dark intellectual face looking down at them. Men selling their souls & the future – & fate watching them ..." (OS to Will Schreiner, 9 April 1909, UCT; OSLP transcription)



“Hearty greetings to Dr Abduraman and Jabavu.” (OS to Will Schreiner, 12 July 1909, UCT; OSLP transcription)

“Tengo Jabavu is passing tonight but I’m not able to go to the Station to meet him.” (OS to Anna Purcell, Thursday nd but 1912, UCT; OSLP transcription)

“I went amid pouring rain to see Gandhi & his wife off at the station & went the night before to a little gathering of Indians to see them bid them good bye & I said a few words.” (OS to Betty Molteno, 23 December 1914, UCT; OSLP transcription)

“Could you give me Solomon Platjes address I know a friend who I think might help him with a little money for his paper, if I could ask him here to tea to meet her. Don’t mention it to Platje as it may not come off!!” (OS to Georgiana Solomon, 13 October 1919, UCT; OSLP transcription)

The comments in these letter extracts are typical of many others, which suggest interest, knowledge and familiarity between Schreiner and Jabavu, Abduraman, Gandhi and Plaatje. However, the near absence of letters written directly to these four men is most likely not because such letters were written and later destroyed (the outline dimensions of Cronwright-Schreiner’s burnings are known and no letters to them seem to have been among them). It is most probably because they were never written, that she did not write letters to them, although she did agree with them, was involved in political campaigns with them, and shared a politics and ethics on ‘race’ matters with them. However, alongside this, Schreiner *did* write to a number of white ‘Cape liberal’ and also more retrograde politicians whose politics and ethics she hotly disputed, in paraenetic letters of exhortation and engagement which were an extension of her political activities. To John Merriman, for instance, she insisted on the close relationship between capitalist expansionism and the increasing discriminatory rigidity of notions of race:

“There are two & only two questions in South Africa, the native question, & the question - Shall the whole land fall into the hands of a knot of Capitalists. The Dutch & English question, as you have yourself said, is nothing - in fifty years it will not be. But the native question & the capitalist question ^are in^ their infancy now, will loom right over the land in fifty years time, & unless some mighty change set in, will deluge the land with blood. We who hold that rank confers duties, that a course of stern unremitting justice is demanded from us towards the native ... [only so] can the future of South Africa be anything but an earthly Hell: - we who hold this have no right to let anything divide us. He that is not with us is against us ...” (OS to John X. Merriman, 25 May 1896, NLSA; OSLP transcription)

This would have powerful and deleterious consequences for the future of South Africa, she wrote to F.S. Malan, another liberal in Cape political usage. Her letter on this concerns the political Convention planning the Union of the formerly separate settler states, because at basis this was motivated by race, or rather racism:

“The problems of Dutch & English have for me quite vanished away from the practical horizon in South Africa now. The problem that is rising before us is that of the combination of the capitalist-classes, land-owning & mine-owning, against the rest of the community; & ^an^ ignorant, blind, land-thirsty, gold-thirsty native policy; which will plunge South Africa into war & bitterness, compared ^with^ which the Boer War was nothing. In the picture of Jameson walking with his arm round the neck of his fellow “Conventioner” of Africander blood, I see an omen of evil. It is not love that is uniting you all – it is greed. ‘Cheap land, cheap labour, cheap mines, exploit the nigger’<sup>6</sup> – that is the bond that is uniting you! Merriman tells us there are to be no more parties; that every principle is to die; well we shall see!” (OS to F.S. Malan, 6 January 1909, NELM; OSLP transcription)

And in a letter to the politically more retrograde Jan Smuts, in 1920 Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, a letter which was written around the

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<sup>6</sup> As Schreiner’s use of quote marks indicates, the word is not Schreiner’s, but one she is attributing to these men and it is done to signal their at basis racism.

occurrence of strikes which were broken by government-sanctioned armed force, Schreiner wrote that:

“... I wish I knew you were taking as broad & sane a view on our native problem as you took on many European points when you were there. The next few years are going to determine the whole future of South Africa in 30 or 40 years time. As we sow we shall reap. We may crush the mass of our fellows in South Africa today, as Russia did for generations, but today the serf is in the Palace & where is the Czar? ... Jan dear, you are having your last throw; throw it right this time. You are such a wonderfully brilliant & gifted man, & yet there are sometimes things which a simple child might see which you don't! You see close at hand - but you don't see far enough ... This is the 20th century; the past is past never to return, even in South Africa. The day of princes, & Bosses, of is gone forever: one must meet the incoming tide & rise on it, or be swept away ^forever.^”  
(OS to Jan Smuts, 28 October 1920, Pretoria; OSLP transcription)

Schreiner's many letters to Merriman, Malan and Smuts are prototypically concerned with structural and interpersonal racism in South Africa, about how this will play out in the future, about the responsibility of whites for its existence and thus for initiating its reparation. Also, in these extracts Schreiner's comments are direct, to the point, and insist on the future consequences of present racist policies and also emphasise that the addressees bear personal as well as collective responsibility for this.

Schreiner did not write letters to the black politicians she agreed with, then, but she was involved in a shared practical politics with them; while she did write letters of a particular kind to white politicians she disagreed with, letter-writing which is a form of practical political engagement in its own right. And in this regard it is also worth noting that Schreiner's letters to her closest friends and family members similarly avoid the argumentative, exhortatory and paraenetic too, so that generally she seems to have written in

this exhortatory way only with people she disagreed with and was in an intellectual sense sparring with. From this some questions about the different kinds of letter-writing Schreiner engaged in arise, in particular regarding the relationship of epistolarity to politics and her political engagements, for regarding the ‘white bad guys’, the relationship of her political engagement with epistolarity was very close one, while for the ‘black good guys’ it was almost antithetical.<sup>7</sup> And this in turn has further implications for conceptualising and understanding the Schreiner epistolarium and its complicated inclusions, exclusions and border-traffickings.

### **Letters: They Do Things Differently There**

The removals, dramatic destructions and everyday attritions that characterise effectively all collections of letters importantly impact on the structural properties of the Schreiner epistolarium too. The consequentiality of such things is undoubted; and, given the recalcitrance of absence, renegade ways of gauging its properties and relationship to what is present and extant have to be crafted (Carerra 1994, 1996; Halldorsdottir 2010). However, the focus of discussion here is something with perhaps more profound implication, and which is certainly more slippery in an ontological sense. Regarding Olive Schreiner’s letters, who is written to, under what kind of circumstances, and in what kind of way or tone of epistolary voice, is a by no means straightforward matter of looking at recipient names and counting

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<sup>7</sup> As pointed out in Stanley & Dampier 2010a, this is paralleled later concerning Schreiner’s letter-writing or its absence concerning the Great War and pacifism.

letters and concluding ‘this was her (epistolary) world’. In particular, the most momentous activities of Schreiner’s mind – the example of her engagement with race matters being the case in point - slide between her published writings, her remaining manuscripts, her letters, and have to be pieced together and assessed using unwieldy fragments and by reckoning the many gaps.

The simple point to draw from this is that regarding the complex rhetorical textual and non-referential aspects of someone’s letters, the epistolarium, constitutes a composed landscape with figures and it exists in an extremely complicated relationship, not only to the life of mind of the letter-writer, but also to their ‘everyday world’ of eating, sleeping, working, meeting people, talking, cooking, as well as writing letters and in Schreiner’s case also penning novels, essays, polemics and allegories. The more important point to make, however, is that notions of referentiality have both to be surrendered and disbanded, *and at one and the same time* also grasped and explored. That is, letters are, as Houseman’s poem perceives the past, another country and they do things differently there; *and* letters also have immensely referential properties, from their material physical form and their reliance on postal services, to their inscriptions of events, planning of meetings, their references back to shared experiences, and their strong requirement for reciprocity from the addressee. Both the anti-referential and the strongly referential coexist and have to be held in tandem analytically.

The marked absences, the never there, the shadows and echoes of those off-scene, also have character and are the shadowings of ‘the lived life’,

the everyday routines, ordinary journeys, unremarkable meetings with friends and acquaintances, including ordinary letter-writing. These structural features of absence, silence and shadow mark the landscape and dispose or organise the people present within or absent from the epistolarium almost as much as its reciprocal exchanges between the routine presences and the towering figures who together compose the addressees of Schreiner's extant letters. There is another consequential point to make here too: the letters that remain, those that are extant, can be misleading, indeed are in a sense *always* misleading, in discerning the contours of the landscape of the epistolarium, let alone the 'lived life'. There are patterns to absence as well as presence, and while capturing those of absence can be difficult to impossible, it is always necessary to attempt it if the epistolary landscape is to be understood.

Letters are frequently referred to as about self-fashioning: they craft an authorial epistolary presence as well as tone of voice, with their referential properties are always beneath a sign saying 'under construction'. They are also referred to as about fashioning others as well as self, and this is certainly so regarding Olive Schreiner's exhortatory or paraenetic letters to the 'Cape liberal' and retrograde politicians commented on earlier. These letters are often 'great letters' and they construct a Schreiner who persuades, flatters, argues, cajoles the men concerned to live up to her epistolary vision of them; and they inscribe the liberal politicians (Rose Innes, Malan, Merriman) as towering political presences who could, should, almost do, live out their proclaimed liberalism on race matters, and the retrograde politician (Smuts) as a man of principle who falls only just short of being truly great in worldly terms. But at the same time, there is the matter of how to understand this tone

of epistolary voice and the political engagements it inscribes, both in its own terms and also regarding the absence of such letters to political figures (Abdurahman, Gandhi, Jabavu, Plaatje) with whom Schreiner largely agreed.

At a simple level and regarding the South African political context again, Merriman, Malan and Smuts assume a character of particular shape and proportion they did not have outside of the epistolary exchanges as Schreiner wrote these; the political territory and their place in it was reconceived in Schreiner's letters to them, in part because writing is not coterminous with living and always has a transmutationary effect, in part because her letters were written with future political circumstances and possibilities in mind and were never about 'describing' in a one-to-one way what was actually going on politically. And similarly so regarding the equally 'real-world' important political presences of Jabavu, Abdurahman, Gandhi and Plaatje within Schreiner's lived life and political engagements – their epistolary absence and bit-part presence in her letters to other people also has character and proportions and from this can be read, at least conjecturally, a closer political agreement than with Merriman et al.

But how does this conceive the epistolary world, what does it say about the landscape of the epistolarium, and how is Schreiner as a letter-writer and her others positioned within this landscape with figures? One thing to note is that parts, but by no means all, of this landscape are treacherous, duplicitously seeming to be one thing, but actually turning out to be another. Major engagements turn out to be fundamental disagreements covered by flattery and political manoeuvrings; epistolary absences assume shadowy but

discernible high points of ethical and political agreement; routine plateaus and plains have immense depths guarded by notions of the primacy of the material world of things and events; epistolary depictions of the contours of these things and events turn out to be the outline shape of something else, the hoped for or feared scenery of the future. Another, related, notable feature is that different epistolary figures in the landscape of Schreiner's letters have dissimilar ontological properties: the duplicitous presence of Merriman et al, the fateful absence of Abdurahman et al, the relied upon bedrock of such figures as Betty Molteno, Mary Sauer, Havelock Ellis, Will Schreiner, Anna Purcell. 'An addressee is not an addressee is not an addressee' is one proper conclusion to draw, and so too is 'a letter is not a letter is not a letter'. The related conclusion is that the specific parts of the Schreiner epistolarium cannot really be known without grasping the features of the whole. The example of Schreiner's exhortatory or paraenetic letters is that, taken at face value, the epistolary presence of a Malan as an addressee of Schreiner letters, and the absence of a Jabavu, might be seen to equate with political agreement and ethical approval or its converse – except that this is actually not correct. All evaluations made 'to the letter', important though these are, also need at the same time to be suspended and investigated by reference 'to the epistolarium' as a whole (as also argued in Salter, this volume). That is, an interpretation that looks supportable when attached to a small number of letters can look suspect or just plain wrong when considered across the 5000+ of them.

Olive Schreiner was a writing woman. From a very young age she

'told stories'; as an adolescent she began the struggle to craft these on paper



with the resonance they had in her mindful tellings and re-tellings; and this continued to the end of her life and occurred across and between conventional genre distinctions, including the slippery relationship of her letters to all the other forms she wrote in (Stanley 2002b). A key example of this has been discussed earlier, concerning the relationship – or lack of relationship – between Schreiner’s early 1890s letters and her ‘Returned South African’ essays. These essays, particularly the manuscript incarnation of the first essay, inscribe a fundamental intellectual, political and ethical sea-change regarding Schreiner’s thinking about ‘race’ matters which is barely noticed in her letters of the time, but which underpinned the rest of her life, her activities, her writing and among this her letters too. If nothing else, this strongly indicates the highly complicated relationship of ‘the letter’ to ‘the life’ generally, as well as suggesting that in Schreiner’s case an equally complicated relationship exists with ‘the writing’. However, if the messy manuscript of the first ‘Returned South African’ essay were not by happenstance extant, and if Schreiner’s entire letters were not in process of being transcribed and published, then relating ‘writing’ and ‘letters’ around the idea of the epistolarium in this way would not be possible.

And of course there is still the matter of the ‘lived life’ in the material world in relation to such representational forms to be considered, introducing yet another set of questions, issues and complexities which have to be taken into account. Different strategies are possible regarding this. The more usual one is to ‘compare and contrast’ autobiographically produced materials with a range of external third party ones, as in most biographies. However, this tends to give primacy to what are seen as ‘factual’ sources over autobiographical

ones and suggests a realist or perhaps positivist referential take on such things, while the OSLP Project is interested in taking such questions and issues in a different direction by treating the Schreiner epistolarium as immensely porous to ‘life’ as well as to other factors – that recalcitrant referentially insisted upon earlier – and exploring its inscriptions and the epistolary work these do (Dampier 2011b).

### **Back To the Epistolarium: Some Concluding Points**

What has been discussed in this paper adds up, regarding how to conceive - or rather to re-conceive - the Schreiner epistolarium. After 1889, Schreiner engaged in a life project and the epistolarium needs to be thought of in connection with this and how it informed and gave shape to her life and her work, including her letters, in the round. Her letters, like her other writings, were not produced in a vacuum but were always purposeful and sometimes in the Austin sense performative as well, and they concern the world of events, sometimes bloody and terrible events as well as more routinely ordinary ones as well, and the struggle of ‘Olive Schreiner and company’ to change the world for the better. However, what ‘a Schreiner letter’ is, is by no means straight-forward, for letter and non-letter can and do morph back and forth into each other, and ‘great’ or ‘important’ letters can mask political disagreement, flattery and political purposefulness. Drawing boundaries is both difficult and may inhibit understanding of the epistolarium rather than promote it, and so instead of this a strategy of investigating the changing always porous borders between life, letters, politics, writings has been the

approach taken by the Schreiner Letters Project. And the quotidian, quotidian letter-writing but also the everyday quotidian, was the foundation and always has to be reckoned with in thinking about Schreiner's letters, for it is the life and the everyday quotidian that founds the rest of it – no life, no letters, and the at basis referential properties of epistolarity is forgotten or denied at great intellectual peril.

In exploring these points and the ontological and epistemological questions raised by them, I have endeavoured to present a sense of a whole life, by pointing out that the different kinds of activities Schreiner engaged in were joined up as she lived her life, rather than treating her letters as separate and distinct, as a commentary on or description of this rather than a fully constituent part of it. 'Olive Schreiner, "A Returned South African", her letters, her essays, her fiction, her politics, her life' is not intended as a fancy title, but is rather a declaration of intent, a platform for analytical action, and a rallying cry.

### **Acknowledgements**

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# **Re-Readings of Olive Schreiner's Letters to Karl Pearson: Against Closure**

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“The first thing one learns from the letters is that no clear distinction can be made between personal letters and business letters, and consequently between the personal lives of these women and their lives in the movement” (Bosch 1990: 23)

## **Introduction**

While letters have sometimes been assumed to be a ‘private’ form of life writing<sup>8</sup>, and certainly many of Olive Schreiner’s letters have been read in this way – that is, as reflections of her inner emotional life – her letters in fact trouble any simple binary notions of public and private. As the above comment from Bosch suggests regarding feminist movement letters, the personal and the public are interwoven in many letters (as well as in ‘lived life’), with important implications for readings which assume the essentially ‘personal’ or ‘private’ nature of letters. In this paper I offer a re-reading of Schreiner’s letters to the statistician and founder of the Men and Women’s Club, Karl Pearson, drawing on analytical ideas developed by the Olive Schreiner Letters Project and outlined in the Introduction to this set of essays.

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Decker 1998, Maybin 2000, Rappaport 2004. Decker makes a distinction between public and private letters, with the former including letters to newspapers and journals, and which are “adept at mimicking the confidential tone of the private exchange” (Decker 1998: 24). Some commentators have begun to reject a binary distinction between public and private letters’, and have instead focused on the blurring of these categories (Bosch 1990, Gring-Pemle 1998).

In it, I argue that the dominant, indeed the only, reading that has been made of these letters is as ‘unrequited love letters’ and that this needs rethinking, for when these letters are considered in their entirety rather than through the highly selective extracts used by most researchers, when they are contextualised as part of Schreiner’s wider extant manuscript letters, and when the intertwining of their ‘public’ and ‘private’ aspects is recognised, it becomes clear that a considerably more complex interpretation of her letters is required.

The paper will consider in some detail how Schreiner’s letters to Pearson have been read to date, what differences arise from re-reading the letters ‘in whole’ and ‘in context’, and what the implications of this are for reading letters more generally.

### **‘Undoubtedly Love Letters’? Readings of Schreiner’s Letters to Pearson**

Schreiner left South Africa for England in 1881, taking with her among other writings the manuscript of her novel, *The Story of An African Farm*, publication of which in 1883 propelled her to international fame. By the mid 1880s she had developed friendships with, amongst others, Havelock Ellis, Eleanor Marx and Edward Carpenter, and had become part of a number of radical intellectual networks. In 1885 she was ‘recruited’ by Elisabeth Cobb to join the Men and Women’s Club, the small discussion group founded by the statistician and polymath intellectual, Karl Pearson. The Club’s remit “was discussion of matters ‘connected with the mutual position and relation of men and women’, from ‘the historical and scientific, as distinguished

from the theological standpoint” (Burdett 2001: 50, see also Bland 1995, Walkowitz 1992).

Schreiner attended the first formal meeting of the Club on 9 July 1885, where Pearson delivered his paper ‘The Woman’s Question’. Her earliest letters to Pearson date from just before this time, with her extant letters to him concentrated in the period between mid-1885 and the end of 1886, when she left England for Europe following a ‘blow up’, the details of which are discussed later, involving Pearson, Mrs Cobb and another member of the Club, Bryan Donkin. Donkin was the Marx family doctor and also acted as one of Schreiner’s physicians at the time, as well as being importunately in love with Schreiner. It is this rupture (in which it appears that both Mrs Cobb and Bryan Donkin at different times decided that Schreiner was ‘in love’ with Pearson and conveyed this to him, followed by Schreiner’s subsequent denials and eventual departure for Europe) which have importantly shaped the readings made of Schreiner’s letters to Pearson (his letters to her are not extant).<sup>9</sup> Schreiner’s letters to Pearson, or rather the selected secondary extracts drawn on, have been interpreted by many feminist and ‘New Woman’ scholars as well as others as entirely ‘intimate’, and specifically as private, emotional and centred on her allegedly romantic (and unrequited) love for Pearson. In some instances, this emphasis on

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<sup>9</sup> Pearson evidently requested Schreiner’s permission to keep her letters to him, while she destroyed most of those she had received from him. In a letter to Pearson of 11 November 1890, written after she had returned to South Africa, Schreiner commented, “With all my heart keep the letters if they are of the smallest interest to you. The reason I asked for them was that before I went to Switzerland the first time when I thought I was dying, I got a friend to burn all the letters I had received during my London life.” (UCL; OSLP Transcription). She added that a “bundle” of Pearson’s letters to her had been overlooked, but that there was “little personal” in these.



Schreiner's 'emotionality' has also shaded into the implication that she was somehow psychologically unstable.

One example here is that Ruth Brandon, in her study of the 'new thinkers', intellectuals and social reformers in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain, suggests that Schreiner's unrequited love for Pearson drove her literally "out of her mind", and that as a result, "in place of the detached intellectual pleasures of the 'man to man' friendship he [Pearson] had specified, he now found himself at the centre of an emotional storm" (Brandon 1990: 63). And, a second example, Judith Walkowitz suggests that Schreiner's main motive for joining the Men and Women's Club was that she "had her eye on Karl Pearson, for whom she developed an intense and unrequited passion", and she repeats as 'fact' the comments made by Elisabeth Cobb, that Schreiner was "a most unreliable club member, 'too emotional' to treat the discussion of sex 'dispassionately'" (Walkowitz 1992: 140). In this connection it is worth noting that Schreiner had caught out Elisabeth Cobb in malicious gossiping about Havelock Ellis and herself, and names Mrs Cobb as a key agent in her own anger and upset about this bad behaviour (Schreiner to Pearson, 11 December 1886 and 30 January 1887; and Schreiner to Ellis, 2 February 1887 and 13 February 1887), information which puts a different complexion on matters.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> That Mrs Cobb habitually gossiped and passed on information to third parties which Schreiner relayed to her in confidence is further illustrated in a letter from Cobb's sister Maria Sharpe (who later married Pearson) to Robert Parker, the Men and Women's Club President, in which Sharpe reveals that Mrs Cobb had told her about the content of a letter Schreiner had written to her describing potential Club member Mona Caird as "not at all sympathetic to Cobb & a little artificial." (30 September 1885, UCL; OSLP Transcription).

A third example is that Pearson's most recent biographer, Theodore Porter, also writes of Schreiner's "emotionality" and claims she "fell in love" with Pearson, and does so in spite of himself commenting on her strong disavowals of sexual feeling for Pearson and her indignation at Pearson and others misunderstanding her on this point (Porter 2004: 144, 142). Indeed, even recent and sympathetic accounts of Schreiner's relationship with Pearson refuse to take seriously Schreiner's denial of what she referred to as 'sex-love' or 'sex feeling' for Pearson. Thus, while acknowledging the importance of not downplaying Schreiner's "*intellectual passion*" for Pearson, a fourth example is that Carolyn Burdett suggests that "it seems difficult to take Schreiner at her word when she strenuously denies any sexual feeling for Pearson", and states that her letters to him are "undoubtedly love letters" (Burdett 2001: 90, original emphasis).

Tellingly, Porter bases his reading of Schreiner and her relationship with Pearson on just two sets of letters – those to Havelock Ellis, for which he has utilised Draznin's (1992) edited collection, and those to Pearson, for which he has relied on transcriptions in the Hacker Papers (in the University College London manuscript collections). The latter was used because Porter sees Schreiner's writing as in "a very difficult hand", even though he reads other letters located in the same archive as Schreiner's in their *original manuscript* form (Porter 2004: 142). Walkowitz too makes use of transcripts in the Hacker papers rather than reading Schreiner's original letters, while Brandon relies on Richard Rive's (1987) problematic edited collection of Schreiner's letters (see Stanley and Dampier 2011). And even Burdett's

more nuanced, sophisticated interpretation draws on Rive's edited letters rather than the originals.

Reading Schreiner's letters to Pearson as expressions of passionate, emotional love in these accounts seems to stem in the first instance from four inter-related methodological problems. Firstly and most consequentially, there has been a focus on her letters to Pearson more or less to the exclusion of all the other extant letters that Olive Schreiner wrote. The interpretations which result tend therefore to view these letters in isolation, rather than as part of Schreiner's wider epistolary practices and engagements. Secondly, attention has been given to only a very small number of the total letters which Schreiner wrote to Pearson, mostly drawn from a very short time period, the summer of 1886, and they have been read in a vacuum rather than as part of a wider context and in the light of other letters from Schreiner's circle and other letters of Schreiner herself. Thirdly, there has been a reliance on the versions in edited collections which are selected and represent only a few of the many letters, and which tend to reproduce only the 'interesting', 'exciting' letters and omit the quotidian, 'ordinary' letters or parts thereof, resulting in a skewed and rather one-dimensional perception of what 'kind' of letters Schreiner wrote to Pearson (Stanley and Salter 2009; Stanley and Dampier 2011). And fourthly, relying on letters in the edited collections is problematic in another way, because these edited versions remove uncertainty and ambivalence by editorially 'smoothing out' the originals, by removing their uncertainties, crossings out, insertions, mistakes and qualifications.

In addition to these methodological problems, the interpretation of Schreiner's letters to Pearson as 'mainly' or 'only' unrequited love letters is perhaps also a product of attempts to make sense of a few of the letters having sometimes complicated and difficult to interpret content. Schreiner's 134 extant manuscript letters to Pearson are overall complex, wide-ranging, highly cerebral and challenging, full of intellectual excitement and fervour.<sup>11</sup> A few of them have troubled or upset content and are written in an ambiguous and rather convoluted way. The result is that as a set they are difficult to categorise as just one kind or type of letter. It is perhaps from this that the rather reductionist tendency to label them as 'letters of unrequited love by an emotionally unbalanced person' has arisen, because that seems to make sense of the parts of the sub-set of these letters in edited form that have been focused on, with the rest excluded.

What I argue in what follows is that the 'love letters' reading problematically misses out and glosses over the complexities of Schreiner's letters to Pearson, while my overall re-reading of them suggests she was attempting, not always successfully, to forge a new type of 'man to man' friendship or comradeship, in which 'public' political and intellectual concerns were paramount, but from which 'the personal' and 'the emotional' could not always be excluded. That is, I am not arguing that Schreiner's letters to Pearson categorically were or were not unrequited love letters, for how could this be determined by anyone now, but that re-reading the Pearson letters as wholly or mainly as 'personal' and 'emotional' stifles

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<sup>11</sup> Of Schreiner's 134 extant manuscript letters to Pearson, which are archived at University College London Special Collections, Rive (1987) has reproduced 47 letters or part-letters.

other important features of them, and also removes from analytic sight their structural similarities with other Schreiner letters, including their public aspects and their characteristics as letters of intellectual and political engagement.

### **Re-reading the Schreiner-Pearson Letters**

The Introduction to this set of essays has already overviewed some of the analytical ideas underpinning the Project, specifically the way in which we conceive the structural features of the Schreiner letters overall. These ideas draw strongly on the notion of the epistolarium, which stresses how knowledge of the shape of the totality of the letters and their over time contexts of production is extremely consequential in influencing the readings that can be made of them (see also Stanley 2004). That is, attending to the overall structural features of the Schreiner letters, rather than focusing just on the details of the content of a few, brings into sight the strongly similar patterns between the letters to Pearson, and those to other Schreiner correspondents which are certainly not in any way to be seen as love letters.

What follows provides a re-reading of Schreiner's letters to Pearson, firstly by situating these in relation to Schreiner's other extant letters with which they share similar features, including intellectual preening and display, as well as discussions and debates about books, ideas, politics and work. Secondly, I explore some of the consequences of reliance on the edited collections of Schreiner's letters and how this has shaped the dominant view of her letters to Pearson. And thirdly, I consider what Schreiner's letters to

Pearson – that is, *all 134 of them*, and *all of these in their entirety* – ‘are’ in a categorical sense, if not letters of unrequited love.

When Schreiner’s letters to Pearson are situated within the overall corpus of her extant letters and re-read in this context, it becomes evident that they are predominantly letters of intellectual and political engagement, and are to some extent paraenetic. That is, in common with numbers of her letters to other correspondents, they entail, although in a complex way, “Schreiner corresponding with people for whom she had some liking and respect but where major political and/or ethical disagreements existed and - key to such letter-writing - she also wanted to persuade or dissuade the people concerned regarding their views and activities” (Stanley and Dampier 2010: 42-43). This is evident, for instance, in one of Schreiner’s earliest extant letters to Pearson, in which she critiques his ‘Woman’s Question’ paper, commenting, “The omission [in your paper] was ‘Man.’ Your whole paper reads as though the object of the club were to dis-cuss woman, her objects, her needs, her mental & physical nature, & man only in as far as he throws light upon her question. This is entirely wrong” (10 July 1885, UCL; OSLP Transcription).

As with her other letters of engagement, Schreiner uses many of her letters to Pearson to display her intellectual abilities, and to influence and persuade him on a range of political and intellectual topics. *Contra* the secondary literature commenting on the Pearson letters, they are actually predominantly concerned with analysis and development of topics then under discussion by the Men and Woman’s Club and more generally at the

time – that is, with matters concerning the external, public world. In this regard the letters discuss in detail a range of intellectual, literary, political and other concerns, from freethinking to aesthetics, from the nature of life to books to read, as well as a set of contemporary political concerns connected to ‘the woman question’, including prostitution, the age of sexual consent, and the Contagious Diseases Acts.

In several respects Schreiner’s letters to Pearson share some features with those she wrote to the Cape politician John X. Merriman and the English evangelical newspaper editor W.T. Stead. In these she is ‘doing’ feminist politics and feminist theory, as well as arguing South African politics, and in them she ‘shows off’ her knowledge and learning, discussing books, reading and ideas. In her letters to Stead, Schreiner attempted to dissuade him from his support for Cecil Rhodes; in those to Merriman, she put forward her political views, particularly regarding the ‘native question’, and attempted to awaken what she regarded as his political duty as a white ‘liberal’. These examples, and others, suggest that Schreiner’s “analytical letter-writing was designed to impress, or perhaps rather to shine in the eyes of, the addressee in question”, with this related to the highly performative nature of these letters, and their efforts to instigate political or intellectual changes (Stanley and Dampier 2010: 43). In her letters to Pearson, Schreiner frequently comments on the books which have intellectually influenced her, and suggests books to Pearson which she thinks may benefit and perhaps alter his thinking:

“^Please really read Whitman. You will like him so much.^” (4 November 1885, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

“I send you my old copy of Emerson. Don’t read it of course if you’re not inclined. It doesn’t teach one any thing; it doesn’t give one any new ideas. The day I read the essay on “Selfreliance”, was ^a^ very great day to me unreadable. I always thought I was alone till then. I hope you’ll like him.” (19 November 1885, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

“There is a book I want you very much to read if you have not already done so. Robertson Smith’s “Kinship & Marriage in Early Arabia.” I wish you would read it before you go on with your work.” (27 July 1886, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

In other letters Schreiner also details her responses to books Pearson had sent or recommended to her, for instance commenting on her seemingly visceral enjoyment of Robert Hamerling’s 1882 novel *Aspasia*, which had much influenced Pearson: “I am reading *Aspasia*. I like it. It is a book to read slowly & enjoy as one does poetry, sucking it in it. May I keep it a little longer?” (20 October 1885, UCL; OSLP Transcription).

Schreiner’s letters to Pearson also respond to and critique in a frank way his ideas and work and debate as an equal their shared intellectual and political concerns. In this, they are much like the letters she wrote to J.T. Lloyd, W.T. Stead, Havelock Ellis and others, and Schreiner uses the metaphor of ‘the study’ (that is, her intellect and her letters) to urge the recipients to take practical action, action in its companion term ‘on the streets’ (literally so regarding support for Stead’s campaign regarding the age of consent). Schreiner herself always straddled and sought to bridge the study/street division, and her comment in a letter to Havelock Ellis, that “You of all people I ever met (infinitely more than Karl) are a man of the study & nothing else” (25 January 1888, HRC; OSLP Transcription)

suggests that she saw Pearson’s potential for putting his intellectual work to



practical political purpose. She also commented to Pearson about his writing:

“I have been much interested in the paper. Of course I agree with very little of it, but the first muddle about the A.B.C. is very good. The last little bit doesn't to me seem worthy of you. I have a feeling that you are trying to prove a foregone conclusion for some purpose or other. Do you understand what I mean? Generally you reason right out, without caring where your reasoning takes you; so it be true. I don't ^feel it^ in this case. It may be my blindness.” (4 November 1885, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

“The Ethic of Freethought I like best of all your writings that I have seen. Ellis tells me it is out of print; have you perhaps another copy that you might spare me? I want to send it to some one at the Cape. I return the Martin Luther paper. I do not like it very much. I sympathize strongly with the main idea. But you sometimes make assertions in it which it does not seem to me you yourself would ^quite^ be prepared to defend. You seem to wish more to prove your point than to get at the truth, & that is a quality I don't see in anything else of yours.” (September 1885, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

“Shortly – I think the first part seems not to be your own work. It is a series of assertions where only possibilities, probabilities & high probabilities are allowable. This is not your fashion but very much that of many German thinkers of a certain school, who see a probability, work it into a connected theory & stare at it till they think it is proved forever. Didst thou stand at the elbow of the Almighty & watch man developing from the brute that thou knowest all these steps?” (11 June 1886, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

In such comments, while she makes some admiring and perhaps flattering observations about Pearson's work, Schreiner also repeatedly criticises his tendency to draw 'foregone conclusions' and make assertions he cannot defend, and queries his use of 'proof' and evidence in building arguments. Far

from ‘catering or deferring’ to Pearson, as Walkowitz implies (1992: 163), Schreiner engages critically with Pearson’s ideas and argues strongly with those she finds unconvincing or poorly evidenced in a way that few others at the time or subsequently had the courage or ability to do.

Many of Schreiner’s letters, as shown in the examples which follow, sought to provoke Pearson into mental action. They exhort and cajole him to intellectual activity, much as Schreiner sought through epistolary means to jolt South African politicians Jan Smuts or F.S. Malan into political action (Stanley and Dampier 2010). Many of Schreiner’s comments are focused on Pearson’s future as a ‘great mind’, and urge him to cultivate his abilities, fulfil his intellectual promise, and protect himself from the ‘excessive demands’ of public life which might intrude on his ability to develop and work:

“You will do some great work some day (perhaps not everything you think of now) but you will grow silently for some years first. I’ve never done any of my real work yet, but I think I begin to see what it is. I don’t despise the work you have done, but it doesn’t in any way represent you.” (6 November 1885, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

“Why did you never tell me about these lectures before? Have they been printed? I knew that you had dreamed of writing a history of German literature & civilization, but I thought it was only a dream; *unreadable* I did not know that a vast amount of labour had already been expended on it. You must & will carry it out. Why don’t you save as much as you can for the next four years, & then go & live very economically some where in Germany for nine or ten, & work. It can never be done in London in the snatches of time between your lectures & other duties.” (12 June 1886, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

“//I think you ought to write that book on woman. You will find that your thoughts get clearer as you go on I think; & when you get to the

end of the book you can write the first part, if you find things have become clearer to you.” (3 July 1886, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

“Are you striving to shut yourself off from excessive demands. You cannot have solitude & separation from London life. In it, are you realizing that your first duty is rest; are you pressing out your juice when it has hardly had time to form? Is that terrible on, on, on, eating you? Have you realized that an hour’s joyful work of a brain leaping up spontaneously from its rest, surpasses in value the anxious *unreadable* work of years? If I had stayed in London for two years more I should have broken down forever under intense pressure, with out any disease, & done no more work. Are you guarding yourself from a like fate? Are you putting your hand over yourself & saying ‘Rest, that is your highest duty ^to the world just^ now’? Have ^you^ infinite faith in yourself &, if the next year passes without any work, ^will you^ know that your ideas & your work are ripening? Work on slowly, steadily, do not seek to expand, ripen.” (5 February 1888, UCL; OSLP Transcription)

These letters are written in a ‘you are my hope for the future’ style, urging the recipient to be ‘his best self’. In addition, they indicate that while Schreiner found many of Pearson’s ideas stimulating, she also disagreed with much of his analysis of ‘the woman question’, especially his view of women’s sexuality as driven solely by a maternal impulse. Schreiner’s letters took on and argued with these ideas, and attempted to persuade Pearson to rethink his analyses by challenging his hypotheses, pushing him to revise, develop and refine his ideas, as in her comments above about ‘growing steadily’, ‘working steadily’ and ‘ripening’.

As with Schreiner’s other letters of engagement, which came to abrupt end at the point at which she gave up on the person concerned ever changing (her letters to Merriman, for example, ceased after he failed to vote against the 1913 Natives Land Act), so her correspondence with Pearson

effectively ended when Schreiner left Europe for South Africa in late 1889 and consciously turned away from the inter-personal and towards the external, public world of politics and action. Only a small handful of letters to Pearson were written in the period from then to the last extant letter of July 1895. In this regard too, the Pearson letters share features with other Schreiner letters similarly structured and ‘pitched’. When the structural features of Schreiner’s letters to Pearson are attended to, and when they are situated in the totality of the corpus of Schreiner’s extant letters, a very different reading of them emerges, one in which ‘private’ recedes from view and ‘public’ comes to the fore.

The ‘unrequited love’ reading of the letters to Pearson has relied on edited collections of Schreiner’s letters, as noted, and one result of this is a temporal problem. That is, it has produced the exclusive focus on one period of Schreiner’s correspondence with Pearson – the summer of 1886 – from which the bulk of the letters to Pearson appearing in Rive’s edited collection are drawn. On either side of this period, both the many intellectual, as well as the equally many mundane, everyday letters or components of letters, have been ignored, with the focus on only the small number read as ‘proving’ Schreiner’s unrequited love for Pearson. Letters dealing with ordinary Club business, making social arrangements for lunch parties or to go boating, landlady woes and the weather have largely not been selected for inclusion in the edited versions of Schreiner’s letters, and thus have not been ‘seen’ by those researchers who depend only on edited collections, anymore than Schreiner’s magnificent discourses on prostitution (19 July 1885), on Montaigne’s essay on friendship (4 April 1886), on phases of the

mind (Tuesday July 1886), aesthetics (7 July 1886) or on her planned ‘sex book’ (10 September 1886) have been seen either.

In addition, within whole letters, the parts of these dealing with everyday, quotidian matters have either been deliberately excluded or have not been ‘seen’. The focus has been on those parts of Schreiner’s letters deemed salacious, provocative, potentially controversial, charged with supposedly ‘hidden’ meaning. Thus in several cases Rive has removed the ‘mundane’ parts of letters dealing with, for example, Men and Women’s Club business (19 July 1885), confusion about arrangements for a social meeting (11 October 1885), or Schreiner’s explanation for why she has sent Pearson her copy of Thoreau’s *Walden* (10 May 1886). Taken in isolation these examples may not seem significant, but the cumulative effect of stripping out nearly all references to the everyday is to give Schreiner’s letters to Pearson an intensity they do not necessarily possess when read in their original form. Moreover, Rive has made more consequential omissions which are likely to have shaped subsequent readings of these letters. One example here concerns his omission of several of Schreiner’s criticisms of Pearson’s work, including in her 18 June 1886 letter, in which she explains what she refers to her as her “nasty & carping” criticisms of a paper Pearson had written. Another striking example is his editing of her important letter of 3 July 1886 (which Rive misdates 2 July 1886) concerning aesthetics and the senses. Rive includes the very start of the letter and then omits Schreiner’s long meditation on the senses of touch, taste and smell, instead jumping ahead several pages to the latter part of the letter dealing with what Schreiner refers to as the ‘sexual sensations’ (Rive 1987: 85).

In addition to removing those parts of the letter he judged ‘unimportant’, Rive has also vanished the deletions, insertions and other amendments Schreiner made, implying a certainty and ‘cut and dried-ness’ the letter with its ‘bird in flight aspects’ did not necessarily intend. The result is a curiously one-dimensional, distorted view of these letters as literally and completely ‘out of the ordinary’. And finally, while the examples given above of Rive’s editorial excisions are indicated by his use of ellipses, these are in fact frequently *not* indicated by ellipses but appear unmarked, implying erroneously that such letters are complete (see for example his exclusion of Schreiner’s final insertions on the letters dated 23 March 1886 and 11 June 1886, with the latter misdated by Rive as 10 June 1886).

There are many letters and parts of letters from Schreiner to Pearson concerned with the ordinary and the quotidian, including around making arrangements to meet and discussions of Club administrative business. Reading these interspersed amongst the ‘big’ letters to Pearson puts a different complexion on the whole, and certainly suggests a very different interpretation of their relationship. This is that, for Schreiner at least, it was mainly concerned with of the external world and intellectual exchange, and not the personal one of romantic love, as her comment to him on 30 January 1887 makes clear:

“The life of a woman like myself is a very solitary one. You have had a succession of friendships that have answered to the successive stages of your mental. When I came to England a few years ago, I had once, only, spoken to a person who knew the names of such

books as I loved. Intellectual friendship was a thing I had only dreamed of. Our brief intellectual relations & our few conversations have been common-place enough to you, to me they have been absolutely unique. I have known nothing like it in my life. You will be generous & consider this when you remember how I have tortured you with half-fledged ideas, & plans of books that could never be written.” (UCL; OSLP Transcription)

Indeed, this comment on her general intellectual isolation resonates with those Schreiner made elsewhere, for example in her response to Edward Carpenter’s attack on the intellect: “What you, who have been over taught, are striking at, is that wretched choking of the intellect that goes on in schools & colleges, but we, people who have never been over fed like myself, we who have never been to school who have never been taught anything, we cannot feel as you do. You have been over fed. We are dying of hunger” (21 January 1889, UCL; OSLP Transcription). This chimes with Schreiner’s remarks to Pearson and helps to contextualise the great importance she attached to intellectual friendship.

In the readings of Schreiner’s letters to Pearson referred to, it is not that her denials that she had ‘fallen in love’ with Pearson have not been *read*, but that they have not been *believed*. The ‘unrequited love letters’ interpretation stems in part from the methodological problems already discussed, I have proposed. But it seems to me it is also an outcome of trying to make sense of those of Schreiner’s letters to Pearson which do not fall into any clear or obvious category and which contain ambiguities, especially regarding their at times concurrent inscriptions of the abstractly intellectual and the directly detailed and personal.

Schreiner, my own view is, was ‘trying out’ a new kind of friendship in her letters to Pearson, a ‘from man to man’ comradeship wherein the impersonal discussion of public matters dominated. She commented directly on this on a number of epistolary occasions, in the extracts following urging him to consider her as a friend, and therefore in contemporary terms as a man:

“//Have you ever read Montaigne’s essay on friendship? I sometimes feel that he is my favourite writer, & that ^that is^ my favourite of his essays. Yes, friendship between men & women is a possibility, & our only escape from the suffering *unreadable* which sexual relationships now inflict.” (4 April 1886, UCL; OSLP Transcription)  
“but I’m not a woman, I’m a man, & you are to regard me as such.” (29 June 1886, UCL; OSLP Transcription)<sup>12</sup>

At about this time Schreiner wrote similarly to Edward Carpenter, “I wish I was a man that I might be friends with all of you, but you know my sex must always divide. I only feel like a man, but to you all I seem a woman!” (12 April 1887, Sheffield; OSLP Transcription), and she later commented wryly, “I won’t be a woman in a couple of years. I began to be one when I was only ten so I dare say I will leave off being one in about two or perhaps three more, & then you’ll think I am a man, all of you, won’t you? Karl Pearson & every one, & will be comrades with me!” (16 April 1888, Sheffield; OSLP Transcription). It seems then that, far from providing a romantic love element to her friendship with Pearson, Schreiner viewed

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<sup>12</sup> The letter in which Schreiner makes this comment does not appear in Rive 1987.



being of the ‘opposite sex’ as an impediment to the friendship, one which she conceived of as centred on intellectual and political comradeship.

At the same time, however, and of course aware of Pearson’s interest in ‘the woman question’ and women’s perceptions and experiences, Schreiner also seemed to offer herself up as an object of study, commenting, for example, “I seldom write to you about myself personally, as a woman, because I don’t know what would be scientifically interesting to you.” (July 1886, UCL; OSLP Transcription). In some respects it is difficult to square this with her emphasis elsewhere on egalitarian comradeship. And in spite of her attempts to focus exclusively on the impersonal, the scientific and public matters, her letters slip and slide into other things, such as expressing concern for Pearson’s physical health, and becoming embroiled in the exchange of gossip about who has said what about whom. A ‘push’ and ‘pull’ occurs in Schreiner’s post-1886 letters to Pearson, where she vacillated between ‘do not write to me’, ‘I no longer have any need of you’, and then continued writing to him and asked him to send her his work. This suggests that she was not able to separate the ‘public’ and ‘private’ in any easy way, and for those commentators who have looked at these later letters, this has doubtless contributed to the idea that Schreiner’s letters to Pearson are predominantly concerned with her unrequited love for him, and have also perhaps resulted in the perception of Schreiner as unstable in some undefined sense.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> A further complication is that at this time, in the mid 1880s, Schreiner had been given by Donkin and other doctors large quantities of morphine to treat her asthma and heart problems. In the period of her ‘flight’ to Europe in late 1886 and early 1887, it is likely her removal was in part

But whatever the complications, it is clear that once ‘the before’, ‘the after’ and ‘the rest’ of Schreiner’s letters to Pearson are taken into account, these cannot plausibly be reduced to being merely concerned with Schreiner’s inner, emotional life. Relatedly, there is a complex relationship between the public and the private in her letters to Pearson; they are certainly not ‘just love letters’, but nor are they exclusively impersonal letters concerned with public affairs, and nor are they entirely letters of comradeship. My re-reading of Schreiner’s letters to Pearson sees all of these being involved, but positions them in particular as letters of intellectual and political conversation and engagement. In this, Schreiner was striving for a new kind of friendship or comradeship between men and women, one concerned primarily with the external world of ideas, science and social change, with ‘individuals’, ‘personalities’ and ‘emotions’ present, but secondary to “the touch of brain on brain” (7 July 1886, UCL; OSLP Transcription) which was so central to Schreiner’s epistolary relationship with Pearson. Love was important to this, but reading the entirety of these letters convinces me that this was both more and considerably less than the ‘in love’ kind which other commentators have fixated on.

### **Re-Readings: Against Closure**

Taken as a whole, Schreiner’s letters confound assumptions about public and private as epistolary ‘types’ – the private and public are intertwined

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to break with medically-provided morphia dependence. This could have impaired the clarity and coherence of her response to the tangled events unfolding around Pearson.

throughout. And while Schreiner's letters to Pearson may be intellectually and interpersonally 'intimate', this does not always and necessarily translate into emotional intimacy, but instead more often to an attempted distancing from the 'personal'. Letters assumed to be the most 'private' – here those of 1886 to Pearson – are in fact strongly marked by a concern with the external world and impersonal intellectual matters.

Overall, the implications of this discussion for reading letters in general and the Schreiner corpus in particular, and making use of them as a historical and social science resource, seem fairly clear. The notion of the epistolarium, with its insistence on structure as well as content, the shape of the totality, and the relationship of the text of letters to the contexts of their production, all have to be taken seriously. And once this is done, it produces a different reading and analysis of letters to those readings focused on the minutiae of content and the ostensibly 'private' nature of letters, because it highlights not only complexities, but also shifts and differences both over time and as written to different correspondents. I have re-read Schreiner's letters to Pearson around the Project's ideas about the epistolarium, and situated these letters in the wider Schreiner corpus specifically as letters of political and intellectual engagement albeit containing many other features as well. However, the arguments I have made are not confined to 'these letters', but also have reverberations across the entire Schreiner letters and for re-readings of other collections of letters too. One implication here concerns the importance of reading letters in their full and original form, and relatedly, to read them as part of their wider epistolary context.

Obviously Schreiner's letters to Pearson can be read in a number of additional ways using various of the theoretical ideas outlined in the Introduction to these essays. They shed light on the inter-relationship between Schreiner's 'on the page' and 'off the page' activities concerning 'the woman question', for example. And they could also be used to think about 'letterness' and what a letter is (Stanley 2011a, 2011b, Poustie 2010, Stanley, Dampier and Salter 2011), for many of Schreiner's letters to Pearson shade into other forms of writing, including polemic, intellectual essay and political treatise. However, what I have focused on is the more basic question, an ontological question, of what kind or genre of letters these to Pearson 'are' overall. Other readings have insisted or assumed they are one particular known genre, the unrequited love letter, a reading which seems to make sense of their content of 'a woman writing to a man with ambiguous passion'. That this is their defining content is something I have challenged and rejected on factual grounds: re-reading the whole letters, and all the letters, provides something very different, more complicated, and which is in effect genre-busting. That is, the totality of Schreiner's letters to Pearson show her remaking – with troubles and triumphs, hesitations and backslidings, enjoyment and pain – the relationship possibilities between a woman and a man around their pursuit of intellectual, and political and social concerns. It is these troubles, triumphs, hesitations and so on that interest me and engage my attention, not exerting a violent closure over them in reading them as *that* and nothing else.

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## **'Dear Ones!' Multiple Addressees and Epistolary Relationships In A Findlay Family Letter**

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### **Introduction**

There are complicated interplays of the intimate, public and personal/political in the epistolary (and other) management of relationships within a family network. In discussing this, my paper draws on the Olive Schreiner Letter Project's key theoretical idea of the epistolarium and examines letters from the wider Schreiner family network, specifically the large collection of Findlay Family letters. The letters in this collection span the early nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries and also incorporate letters from other family networks as marriages between families took place, as with the Schreiner family being connected, through Olive Schreiner's older sister Katie's marriage to John Findlay, to the Findlay family. Although not a collection of 'Schreiner letters' as such, the Findlay Family letters nevertheless include letters from Schreiner family members and wider related networks, including letters to and from Olive Schreiner's mother, Rebecca Lyndall, dating from the 1830s; childhood letters to Katie Schreiner, as she was before her marriage, from the 1840s and many subsequent letter exchanges; and also letters from other siblings, including Olive Schreiner's brothers Theo, Fred and Will, and her sisters Ettie and Alice. Olive Schreiner herself is mentioned as a small child in letters from



the 1850s, and the first extant example of a Schreiner letter, dated 1871, is archived here, written to her older sister Katie, who by that time was married to John Findlay. And there are other Olive Schreiner letters in the Findlay collection too, written to various family members.

The idea of an epistolarium (Stanley 2004) and the Olive Schreiner Letters Project's development of this frames my discussion in several ways.<sup>14</sup> The paper consequently incorporates ideas about referentiality, taking both the constructed dimensions of letters, and also the real-world activities, events, relationships and contexts that shape them, as important to analysis. It also takes letter-writing to be a social activity and practice, performed amongst a set of connected people (in this paper, family members) who have relationships with each other through but also outwith their letters, and whose letters form part of and are involved in managing these relationships. The Project's idea that epistolary exchanges are frequently predicated on the continuation and maintenance of relationships around interrupted presence, rather than being a solution to a more permanent absence, is also of pertinence here and I return to it later. In addition, the social aspects of letters and letter-writing, which the concept of the epistolarium takes as an important concern, immediately problematise assumptions about letters as a form of 'private' life-writing (Altman 1982; Barton and Hall 1999; Dampier 2011; Daybell 2005; Decker 1998; Earle 1999; Plummer 2001; Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-1920), even family

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<sup>14</sup> See Dampier 2011; Hetherington 2011; Poustie 2010, 2011; Stanley et al 2011; Stanley 2011a, 2011b; Stanley and Dampier 2010; Stanley and Salter 2009; Stanley, Dampier and Salter 2010. For Project publications see: <http://www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk/TeamPublications.html>

letters, and I draw upon this idea to explore the knotty interplays around the ‘public’, ‘private’, personal/political, in the organisation of relationships within the Schreiner-Findlay family network.

In exploring such matters, my paper looks at the ways in which such complex real-world/epistolary relationships are represented and managed in the Schreiner-Findlay family network by examining one particular letter and its writer’s positioning within this network. Firstly, this one letter is focused on, and secondly, the light that other letters from the network throw on its contents is explored. In doing so, I draw on ideas concerning purposiveness and performativity in relation to the epistolarium which involve, among other things, examining the letter’s perspectival dimensions and other rhetorical features, including regarding the construction of an authorial persona (Annuk 2007; Bossis and McPherson 1986; Cockin 2002; Gregoriou 1999; Jolly and Stanley 2005; Lebow 1999; Middleton 2010; Stanley 2006; Stanley and Salter 2009). As I am not dealing with dialogical correspondences between members of the Schreiner-Findlay family network, my paper brackets epistolary reciprocity as commonly understood and instead explores the multiple facets of one letter in an epistolarium, and I discuss the benefits and drawbacks of this in the Conclusion.

### **‘Dear Ones!’ The Letter and Its Reading**

My discussion focuses on a very long letter written by Katie Stuart, the married eldest daughter of Katie Findlay, Olive Schreiner’s older sister. This concerns her mother’s physical and mental health while living in an

Institution in Pietermaritzburg, some 600km away from Pretoria, where the letter was posted in June 1898. The letter begins as follows (there is a transcription of the letter in its entirety in the Appendix and all extracts in the paper following have line numbers relating to this):

Pretoria

June 20th 98

Dear Ones!

You will have learnt from our postcards a good deal about our dear one at Maritzburg, but we would like to share with you many other interesting items regarding her & her surroundings, & as we cannot write to each one we are drawing up this general letter to be sent to each one in turn.

Though we should of course not have undertaken the long journey to Maritzburg had the doctor not ~~answered~~ ^informed^ us that death was imminent, we are very thankful that we did so, & think the expense & trouble more than repaid by the accurate knowledge we have gained by our 12 days stay there of dear Mother's physical & mental condition, & of the character methods of the Institution of which she is an inmate....

(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 1-15. All letter extracts used in this paper are 'to the letter' and thus contain spelling errors, insertions, deletions and emphases as they appear in the original manuscript letters)

Katie Findlay had experienced long-standing physical and mental health issues relating to her multiple childbirths and child-deaths, advancing dropsy (oedema), outbursts of anger and delusions, with this placing a strain on family relationships, not least because she sent often angry and upsetting

letters to family members. Her eldest daughter, Katie Stuart after her marriage, went with Theo Schreiner, her mother's older brother and so Katie Stuart's uncle, to Pietermaritzburg. This was to gauge Katie Findlay's well-being and physical surroundings at the Institution, as presented in the extract above, with the 'Dear Ones!' letter overall providing intimate details of her mother's condition, including about weight changes, the presence of a large tumour, and difficulties regarding her mental health.

The letter is addressed to multiple family 'Dear Ones!' who, although their specific names are never mentioned, are likely to be Katie Stuart's siblings and other relatives, or, more broadly, as Stuart writes later in the letter, "all who love Mother" (316). Through its multiple addressees, the letter blurs the boundaries of private and public, with the considerable personal detail about Katie Findlay it contains meant to be read by a number of only implicitly identified family members. And it also presumably traversed the very public routes of the postal system at unspecified intervals to reach the various and perhaps distant destinations where each of the 'Dear Ones' lived. In addition, in closing the letter Katie Stuart comments that the visit to Pietermaritzburg was undertaken "on behalf of all the members of the family" and that writing and sending the letter represents the end of her and Theo's "special duty":

...We feel that in going to Maritzburg we have been going on behalf of all the members of the family & we are thankful to dear Hudson's liberality which made it possible. We think it was worth the trouble & expenditure & when you have received this letter we hope you will feel so too. Our special duty ends with the writing & sending off of this account of how things are at Maritzburg but we trust that we shall all remember that one of the great pleasures of our dear one's

life which will perhaps now be of but short duration is the receiving of kindly friendly letters, & if we cannot go personally to Maritzburg we can at any rate each manage to write her a loving, cheering letter every fortnight or so, telling her news that will interest her. I am dear ones

Yours lovingly

Katie Stuart...

(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 345-56)

Katie Stuart's comment about her and Theo's visit taking place "on behalf of all the members of the family" (345-6) suggests they took on the role of family representatives, performing a task – "a special duty" (348) – in the name of and indeed *for* all wider family members. The letter is written almost entirely using the plural personal pronoun 'we', and therefore appears to be an account of the shared experiences and views of both Theo Schreiner and Katie Stuart regarding their visit to see Katie Findlay. The frequent use of 'we' clearly implies the 'Dear Ones!' letter is a joint composition. However, questions about this arise when the fact that only Katie Stuart 'signed off' the letter is considered, and I return to this later. Also, this extract comments that Hudson Findlay (one of Katie Findlay's sons, and thus one of Stuart's brothers) financed the trip, for which Stuart expresses thanks. In relation to this, Stuart writes that she and Theo feel the visit was "worth" (347) this expenditure and hope that the 'dear ones' will feel the same way once they have received the letter. The extract also encourages these 'dear ones' to remember to send "kindly friendly letters" (350-1) to Katie Findlay, implying they have failed to do so before this.

The extract also makes it clear that part of Katie Stuart and Theo Schreiner's "special duty" (348) involved an epistolary commitment to other family members. The record of this "special duty" – the 'Dear Ones!' letter – is presented through a complicated 'after the event' narrative, which includes diarising and also, relatedly, elements of itinerising and travelogue. Diarising concerns the letter being written in a way that accounts for time in relation to Katie Stuart and Theo Schreiner's activities as well as regarding Katie Findlay's. In several places, for example, the letter describes what took place over particular time-frames, tying descriptions of events and activities to when these occurred. However, this is not done on a day-to-day basis, with leaps backwards and forwards occurring across and outwith this period as well as specifics concerning hours of the day. Interestingly, at the start of the letter Stuart refers to postcards (6) that she and Theo apparently sent to family members during the course of their visit. This suggests the latter were kept informed in more frequent, piecemeal and 'close to the event' ways about the progress of the visit; while the 'Dear Ones!' letter was written after the event and its diaristic aspects provide readers with an overall sense that the twelve days Stuart and Theo spent at the Institution were busy, time well-spent, can be fully accounted for and hence provide value for Hudson Findlay's money. In addition, the letter details Katie Findlay's activities at particular times and on particular days, with examples including meal times (260-73), a dance every Monday evening (275-6), cricket on Saturdays (310-11) and a religious service each Sunday afternoon (276-9).

In relation to, and overlapping to some extent with, diarising, the travelogue and itinerising aspects of the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter are two broad ways in which the remit of this letter – “to share with you many other interesting items regarding her & her surroundings” (7-8) – is addressed. Firstly, the letter provides a record of a trip, commenting at the beginning on “the long journey to Maritzburg” (11). Secondly, the letter comments on Stuart and Theo’s “daily visits” (172) to see Findlay over the course of the visit and their other movements. It specifies particular interactions with Institution staff and the outcomes of these in terms of Katie Findlay’s health and well-being. And it also mentions the main events in her weekly schedule, itemising the procedures and events around her condition and life in the Asylum and detailing the “medical regularity” (179) by which she lived, such as her weight loss and gain (45-54). Among other things, this constructs the account appropriately in relation to an implied epistolary duty.

The letter’s context is a wider family need for information on Katie Findlay’s status with, for example, Olive Schreiner writing to Hudson Findlay in June 1898 asking for news:

...I began this letter to you the day after I got back from Johannesburg, but it never got any further. Please drop me a line if you have any news of your mother....

(Olive Schreiner to Hudson Findlay, April 1898, NLSA; Olive Schreiner Letters Project Transcription)

At the surface level at least, then, the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter is an overview and summing up of Katie Findlay’s status for family consumption, but it also constructs Katie Stuart – “I am dear ones” (353) - in relation to these

matters, and I return to this shortly. Making sense of the multiple addressees of the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter raises complex issues regarding reading the letter outwards towards the Schreiner-Findlay family network; and also concerning reading it for its rhetorical features, including when refracted through other letters from the network. I now move on to discuss these in turn.

### **Reading The Letter Outwards To The Schreiner-Findlay Family Network**

Reading the letter outwards to the Schreiner-Findlay family network shows that ‘Dear Ones!’ as a set of addressees is both specific and non-specific. The term is tailored to a specific group and collects particular people under this phrase, and it is also ‘general’ in orientation, as shown explicitly in Katie Stuart’s comment that her letter is a “general letter to be sent to each one in turn” (8-9). At the same time, there are implicit boundaries to this network of ‘dear ones’. These operate around ‘real-world’ relationships between members of the family network: relationships between the addressees and Katie Stuart, who in referring to them as her ‘dear ones’ claims a closeness to them; relationships between the ‘dear ones’ themselves; and also the relationship that each family member (including Stuart) had with Katie Findlay. On the latter, Stuart’s comments such as “our dear one” (6; 319; 350) and “our poor darling” (313) suggest a common or shared relationship with Katie Findlay, one which operates on ties of



affection and love and is encapsulated in Stuart's hope that her letter will interest and comfort "all who love Mother" (316).

In addition, although the 'Dear Ones!' letter is to be sent to "each one in turn" (9), no instruction about the order of sending is given. There would, then, have been a series of moments of reading, and perhaps replying or otherwise responding to the letter, as each 'dear one' received it.

However, it is not possible to know if Katie Stuart received any direct epistolary responses to it because no such letters to her are in the collection. Nevertheless, the 'Dear Ones!' letter on the surface encourages two kinds of action on the part of its recipients. The first concerns family visits to see Katie Findlay, as in the following extract:

... it would be very nice & a thing which would give our dear one a great deal of pleasure if one or other of those who love her would visit her for a few days, putting up say at the Barrow Green Tea Rooms Hotel where we put up (^price^ 8/6 a day) & going over to the Asylum in a risksha (1/- fare) for a few hours each day & perhaps taking her a drive in a Landau (price one guinea at Birchells)...

(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 318-322)

Here, Stuart encourages family members to visit Katie Findlay, providing precise details about the practicalities. She emphasises the pleasure such visits would give Katie Findlay and draws on shared ties of affection for her – "those who love her" (319) – to make the point. This not only further defines the character of the ties between the 'dear ones' the letter is addressed to, which further delimits the 'dear ones' network itself, but it also

implies that ‘duty’ forms part of such ties, with Stuart’s instructional comment drawing on such things.

The second kind of action Stuart encourages concerns the ‘dear ones’ writing “kindly friendly” letters to Katie Findlay, briefly commented on earlier, as in the following extract:

... we trust that we shall all remember that one of the great pleasures of our dear one’s life which will perhaps now be of but short duration is the receiving of kindly friendly letters, & if we cannot go personally to Maritzburg we can at any rate each manage to write her a loving, cheering letter every fortnight or so, telling her news that will interest her. ...

(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 349-353)

Here Stuart refers to claims about Katie Findlay’s pleasure at familial contact, particularly from receiving letters; and, rather emotively, she uses the perceived imminence of her mother’s death to bolster her point. Also, in writing that letters to Katie Findlay should be “kindly friendly” (350-1) in their wording, Stuart tries to guide how the ‘dear ones’ should interact in epistolary terms with her. This is evident too in her designation of an appropriate frequency at which such letters should be sent – “every fortnight or so” (352) – which also infers an ongoing dimension to the activities prescribed beyond just reading the letter. Also, by emphasising these activities and in particular that Katie Stuart (and Theo Schreiner) have already done them, the letter positions the ‘dear ones’ as in effect deficient, having the implication of ‘showing them up’ for not doing their family duty.

### **Reading the Letter For Its Rhetorical Features**

The ‘Dear Ones!’ letter is not framed around maintaining individual to individual relationships, then, but concerns the wider family network around Katie Findlay, or more accurately around Katie Stuart and how she is positioned in relation to the others. In other words, the letter can be read about maintaining a family network around a ‘real-world’ set of circumstances and issues, centred on a particular person, and it invokes or rather constructs this in its content and form. At the same time, the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter can be looked at in a way that focuses on its rhetorical features ‘on the page’. This involves examining the letter’s rhetorical construction of Katie Stuart’s role in the family network, with the first aspect of this involving the construction and bolstering of her particular viewpoint of real-world events so as to claim and require a particular reading of them. The second aspect of it is related and concerns the construction of a particular persona for Stuart herself, through which she locates herself at the head of the family network by drawing on a ‘we’ involving Theo Schreiner, her mother Katie Findlay’s older brother and therefore a network ‘king’, the possession of whom is a coup. The ‘Dear Ones!’ letter provides a number of examples of such rhetorical devices, with Katie Stuart augmenting and authenticating her particular viewpoint by providing detailed descriptions of her mother’s circumstances, as in the two extracts now discussed.

The first concerns logging Katie Findlay’s weight changes:

^The dropsy^ increased to such an extent about a month ago that the action of both heart & lungs was seriously impeded, & her sufferings were great & life was in immediate danger. The weight then was 17 stone 6 lbs, & she was increasing in weight a lb per day. Two gallons of fluid was taken away from her immediately by tapping on May

19th, which together with the slow drainage of the following days reduced her weight amazingly, so that on June the 12th ^although she had already begun to increase in weight again,^ she weighed only 15 stone, ~~having lost~~ ^a difference^ of 34 lbs ~~in the interest~~.  
(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 45-51)

In this extract, and elsewhere in the letter, Katie Stuart cites precise weight recordings over a particular time period, 19 May to 12 June 1898. This careful detail reinforces Stuart's viewpoint by adding a sense that it is based in 'quantified' fact. It also helps to approximately date the visit to Pietermaritzburg itself, as the letter does not specify when the twelve-day visit took place. Indeed, Stuart's comment that "When we arrived Dr. Brown said 'You will find Mrs. Findlay at her very best ^physically &^ mentally because of the relief which the tapping has given ...' ... We hoped for instance that when she knew that 34 lbs of water had been taken from her by tapping..." (100-106) suggests the trip took place once Katie Findlay had been drained and the outcome of her water loss was known, hence around 12 June 1898 and before Stuart wrote her 'Dear Ones!' letter on 20 June 1898. This indicates that, on one hand, the 'Dear Ones!' letter was written very soon after the visit, which implies to the readers that the 'facts' about Findlay were as fresh and hence as reliable as possible; and on the other that Stuart had almost immediately inscribed the epistolary finale of the "special duty" (348) she and Theo Schreiner had undertaken.

Katie Stuart's use in this extract of what appears to be a direct quote from a comment made in person by Dr Brown, together with quotation marks to indicate this, points up a further way in which she augments her

viewpoint. Including what is presented as verbatim speech implies that she is reporting first-hand information and also that hers is a stance shared with the doctor. Stuart's quotation of what she presents as Katie Findlay's own speech (111-12; 119-20; 128-9; 132-3; 136; 139-40; 144-5; 198-9; 216; 231; 279-80) and her own and Theo's comments (127-28) have the same effect, implying her letter can be taken as a factual account and acted upon accordingly. Interestingly, Stuart's insertion of “^physically &^” within the above quote raises questions about whether it is indeed verbatim. Her frequent use of insertions in the 'Dear Ones!' letter as a whole could be read as relatively straight-forward corrections, but also as the account having been tailored to seem as thorough and accurate as possible.

The second example describes the surroundings of the Asylum:

The Asylum is situated on a rising spur of one of the beautiful hills surrounding Maritzburg & is about a mile & a half from the town. The outlook is beautiful & scarcely to be beaten in South Africa. An amphitheatre of grassy & wooded hills & vales stretches more than half way round, while on the open side lies the town of Maritzburg with its public buildings & hum of active life, & away in the distance Natal's Table Mountain in the direction of the sea.

(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 299-303)

Here, Stuart's description of the Asylum is in almost guidebook terms, perhaps to convey that such detail was possible only because Stuart was actually there. It also provides her readers with a means of visualising Katie Findlay's surroundings, adding a kind of visual substance to Stuart's account. The photographs of the Asylum and its staff that Stuart promises to send “the rounds of the family” (315), and those of Findlay herself, which

she and Theo Schreiner had taken during the visit and which they will send the 'dear ones' "each a copy in the course of a few weeks" (342-3), are a strong related form of visual substantiation.

Stuart also builds up her viewpoint by also emphasising the amount of time that she and Theo Schreiner spent with Katie Findlay, as well as their in-depth engagement with her circumstances and the care she was receiving, as in the following example:

...We had the free run of the Asylum during our stay, & spent the greater part of each day with Mother, without the presence of anyone else, & had as free intercourse with her as if she were in her own home. In addition we were with her 3 or 4 times when the doctor called & examined her pulse etc, & when the matron & nurses attended to address the surface excoriation caused by the ?tapping, or to attend to her needs of one kind or another, or just to say a kindly loving word to her....

(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 17-22)

Here, Stuart emphasises the freedom of access she and Theo had in the Institution during their visit, including to Katie Findlay herself. By commenting on having spent a good deal of time alone with her mother, Stuart implies that had there been any difficulties which Katie Findlay wanted to tell them about while not in the presence of Institutional staff, there would have been ample opportunity. This further bolsters Stuart's viewpoint by implying that there is no possibility that the positive depiction provided of Katie Findlay's well-being was constrained by the Institution, as in such comments as "we were with her 3 or 4 times when the doctor called..." (19-20).

Reading these rhetorical aspects of the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter in the way  
I have is reinforced by a summary comment from Stuart:

...We thus had every opportunity of becoming acquainted with all the minutiae of her daily life & surroundings & its effects on her...

(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 31-3)

Furthermore, elsewhere in her letter Stuart uses words such as 'testify', as in "...everyone in Maritzburg testifies to their wholehearted devotion to their life's work at the Asylum..." (84-5) and 'corroborate' (167) to emphasise the salience of her viewpoint, and she mentions influential Institution people by title, such as the "Acting Medical Superintendent Dr. R. Brown" who "...corroborates what Theo & I have felt through all these years..." (167-8). And as final verification of her viewpoint, Stuart includes a copied out letter from the Institution's Matron, whom she describes as "...^as^ sweet & yet kindly firm & capable ^a^ gentle ^e^ woman as you could find anywhere in the world." (280-1), as an appendix to her 'Dear Ones!' letter, as follows:

(Copy of letter received from Miss Stewart since this was written)

N.G.A June 20th 98

My dear Mrs Stuart

Thank you so much for your kind letter received this morning.

Mrs Findlay I am glad to say keeps bright & cheerful, out under the trees most of the day, sewing or reading as she feels inclined.

She has been weighed today (Mon) & is 15 st 4 lbs an increase of 4 lbs for the week, which I don't at all like.

I will try & write as often as I can, should Mrs F. get worse you will hear at once, if I possibly can I will write every week.

Will now close with kindest regards to Mr Schreiner & yourself

Very sincerely yours

K. Stewart



Since dinner Mrs F. has been tidying her boxes, & thinks it will be best for her to go to her old room where all her boxes are – if she can have breakfast in bed! – which she can, but she may change her mind again.

K.S.

(Copied out letter from Matron Miss Stewart to Katie Stuart, included in Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 358-82)

This letter not only provides an update on Katie Findlay's status and activities, but also shows that Katie Stuart has, following the visit to Pietermaritzburg, written to Matron Stewart and, based on Miss Stewart's comment that she "will try & write as often as I can" (371), is conducting an ongoing correspondence with her. Stuart draws on Miss Stewart's remarks as a source of information, with copying out the entire letter serving as a large-scale form of using quotation substantiating her perspective. And by providing this correspondence to her readers, Stuart also indicates she is a conduit of very up-to-date knowledge about her mother's circumstances.

Overall, the particular viewpoint that Katie Stuart constructs in the 'Dear Ones!' letter, through a narrative she presents as detailed, thorough and corroborated in a number of ways, also serves to construct a complex emerging 'public self' or 'persona' for Stuart herself (Schuster 2003; *The Persona of the Philosopher in Eighteenth Century Europe* 2006; Condren et al. 2006; Stanley 2006; Stanley & Salter 2009). This is strongly signalled by her invocation of herself as letter-writer, her 'writing-I' (Stanley 1992, 2006), in her "I am dear ones" (353) comment and individual 'sign off' of the letter. It is also signalled by her inclusion of herself as part of the 'we' pronoun she uses, which portrays her as an 'actor' in the narrative she is

telling and hence constructs a sense of her as a kind of ‘written-I’. In other words, Stuart’s persona is constructed through rhetorical devices deployed around both her role as letter-writer and her role as an actor in the events the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter concerns. This adds up to a persona which is diligent about, and lives up to, familial duties; can verify the factualness of what she writes regarding the facts about Katie Findlay’s circumstances; is precise in swiftly writing an account of the visit; and is generally in the know about what is going on, including by personally receiving communications from the Asylum.

The ‘Dear Ones!’ letter provides additional examples of rhetorical devices operating around Stuart’s construction of a persona for herself with regard to her position in the Schreiner-Findlay family network, which I now want to explore. Firstly, Katie Stuart’s persona is constructed around her and Theo Schreiner taking on family responsibility, in particular regarding the visit, as in the following two short extracts (quoted earlier to make different points):

... we are very thankful that we did so, & think the expense & trouble more than repaid by the accurate knowledge we have gained by our 12 days stay there...

(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 12-14)

... We think it was worth the trouble & expenditure & when you have received this letter we hope you will feel so too. Our special duty ends with the writing & sending off of this account of how things are at Maritzburg but we trust that we shall all remember that one of the great pleasures of our dear one’s life ... is the receiving of kindly friendly letters...

(Katie Stuart to 'Dear Ones!', 20 June 1898, Cullen: 346-51)

These extracts come from the beginning and ending of the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter and in a sense top and tail its contents with a reference to the “trouble” the visit was for Katie Stuart and Theo Schreiner, this conveyed to the rest of the family. About halfway through the letter, Stuart reiterates the difficulties, commenting that “Even we found the strain of our daily visits for twelve days very heavy to bear...” (172), and this firmly brings into view the effort that Katie Stuart and Theo Schreiner had made, encapsulated in Stuart’s comment that “...we of course laid ourselves out to make her happy, & humoured her wishes in every possible way” (173-4). In addition, by expressing gratitude for “Hudson’s liberality” (346), there is the further implication that they too are due gratitude from family members.

As Katie Stuart is the named signatory of the letter, she is in effect claiming overall responsibility. Relatedly, by constructing this persona, she firms up her role as the hub of the family network. This reading is illustrated particularly by her instructional comments regarding family visiting and writing to Katie Findlay (319-20; 349-53), and further emphasised by her use of “we trust that” (349) regarding the ‘dear ones’ acting on her encouragements. Part of the subtext here will have been that Katie Stuart is drawing on family politics around being the eldest sister, not only to ‘comfort’ and ‘interest’ the “hearts of all who love Mother” (316) by writing the letter, but also to influence them and in doing so promote her place as central and important to the family network.

Secondly and strikingly, this reading is backed up by Stuart’s frequent use of the ‘we’ pronoun to include Theo Schreiner. This has the

effect of differentiating between this ‘we’ and the ‘dear ones’ she is addressing, reinforced by her comments that she and Theo are unified in “...what Theo & I have felt through all these years....” (167-8). However, an interesting complication arises concerning her signing off of the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter with only her own name. Doing so implies that, while the viewpoint presented is shared with and in this sense verified by Theo Schreiner, Katie Stuart is ultimately responsible and also is enabled to represent Theo in an epistolary sense. This indicates her claims on him, which are implicated in and perhaps even a requirement for her positioning as central to the family network, and her switches between the first-person singular pronoun ‘me’ and the plural ‘we’ in comments such as her “let me say that we think” (318) compound this.

### **Reading the Letter’s Rhetorical Features As Refracted Through Other Letters**

Reading the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter through other letters by people in the family network affects the meaning given to it. ‘Dear Ones!’ is a complex letter. On one level, Katie Findlay is the focus, while on another level the letter is about Katie Stuart positioning herself within the family network. Also, there is no way of knowing how the ‘dear ones’ it addressed responded at the time. However, some idea of this can be gained by considering comments in Olive Schreiner’s letters to other family members concerning Katie Stuart. Schreiner wrote briefly of Katie Stuart to her brother Will Schreiner and his wife Fan, her sister Ettie Stakesby-Lewis and niece Effie Brown, and I will now discuss responses to her around extracts from these letters.

Firstly, a letter to her sister-in-law Fan Schreiner written by Olive Schreiner while living in Hanover, Northern Cape, on 22 September 1901, comments about Katie Stuart regarding a visit to England:

^I suppose Kate Stuart is going to advertise herself all over England as Olive Schreiner's niece.^

(Olive Schreiner to Fan Schreiner, 22 September 1901, UCT; OSLP Transcription)

This visit involved Katie Stuart, acting as a delegate on behalf of the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa, and Theo Schreiner, through his involvement in the South African Vigilance Committee, strongly supporting the British provocation of the South African War (1899-1902) through attending meetings and making speeches.<sup>15</sup> During a visit to Britain, Stuart did indeed 'advertise herself' as Olive Schreiner's niece, speaking along with Theo 'as a Schreiner' to draw on Olive Schreiner's fame in order to oppose the critique of British policy she spearheaded and to advance Loyalist interests. As the extract shows, Olive Schreiner had expected Katie Stuart to behave in this way, and events bore her out.

Secondly, in two letters written in 1906, the first to her brother Will Schreiner and the second to her niece Effie Brown (one of her sister Alice Hemming's daughters), Schreiner's comments imply wanting to avoid Katie Stuart, as suggested in:

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<sup>15</sup> Van Heyningen and Merrett (2002) discuss the activities of the Guild of Loyal Women of South Africa and mention political divisions in the Schreiner family around the time of the South African War between Olive Schreiner and Will Schreiner, and their mother Rebecca Schreiner, Theo Schreiner, Ettie Stakesby-Lewis and Katie Stuart. First and Scott (1980) also discuss these political tensions, particularly regarding Rebecca Schreiner and Olive Schreiner's husband S.C. (Cron) Cronwright-Schreiner; however Katie Stuart's role is omitted. For further information about Katie Stuart's political activities, see Schoeman (2002) and Riedi (2002).

I have just heard that Theo & Kate Stuart have taken a house there for six months. But I can't change my plan because of them. There's no where else I can go.

(Olive Schreiner to Will Schreiner, 7 September 1906, UCT; OSLP Transcription)

I would have gone to the station to see you, but I know Kate Stuart would want to go.

(Olive Schreiner to Effie Brown, 28 November 1906, UCT; OSLP Transcription)

The first extract here is from a letter that Schreiner wrote from De Aar in the Northern Cape about her staying in Matjesfontein for health reasons, and subsequently finding out that Katie Stuart and Theo Schreiner were staying in a cottage attached to the same hotel. Schreiner states she cannot change her plans and, reading between the lines, implies that living in close proximity to the pair is undesirable to her. The second extract is similar and was written after their arrival to her niece Effie. Schreiner wanted to see Effie and her husband Arthur and baby when their train briefly stopped at De Aar; she anticipates that Katie Stuart would want to do the same and this stops Schreiner from doing so. Schreiner's avoidance of Katie Stuart shows that, while Stuart went to lengths to promote herself in the family network, her presence was not always welcome and perhaps her strategising activities were not particularly successful.

Thirdly, several letters Schreiner wrote in February 1909 mention Theo Schreiner being ill with typhoid while staying in Matjesfontein that year and Katie Stuart's activities around this, pointing up issues regarding Stuart's claims over him. The first extract below is from a letter written to

Schreiner's sister Ettie (also known as Het), and the second and third were written to her sister-in-law Fan and her brother Will respectively. These extracts further portray Stuart as problematic and also indicate some of Schreiner's reasons for this:

Ettie darling, Theo seems doing splendidly this morning his temperature is quite normal 99. ... I think he has rather longed to see you (Don't mention this to Kate Stuart.)

(Olive Schreiner to Ettie Stakesby-Lewis, Tuesday February 1909, UCT; OSLP Transcription)

I have just found that Kate Stuart (not Theo) ~~wired~~ ^wrote^ off to Will the moment Theo was said to have typhoid...

(Olive Schreiner to Fan Schreiner, February 1909, UCT; OSLP Transcription)

...Now we find that the very first day, without any request from Theo Kate Stuart wrote off to tell you. She's a - well God hasn't made anything worse; all the evil poor old Theo has done he has been lead into by her. It has been very painful to me to go & speak to her & still more to be near her, but when I heard Theo had typhoid & all the people here were afraid to go & help of course I went.... Alice Findlay & Het offered to come up & nurse him but ~~we~~ Kate wired it wasn't necessary, there would be nothing for them to do.

(Olive Schreiner to Will Schreiner, 5 February 1909, UCT; OSLP Transcription)

In the first extract, Schreiner suggests that Theo Schreiner would have liked to see his sister Ettie but that Katie Stuart should not be told about this because, by implication, she would be jealous. This reading is affirmed by knowledge about wider Schreiner-Findlay family relationships (Schoeman 1992; First and Scott 1980). For instance, it was well-known

among the Schreiner family that Theo Schreiner and Ettie Stakesby-Lewis had been close companions, living together in Cradock in the late 1860s and early 1870s (indeed accommodating an adolescent Olive Schreiner with them), went to the Kimberley diamond fields together, were allied in their strong religious beliefs and had worked together in temperance activities. It was also family knowledge that Katie Stuart had ‘claimed’ her uncle, ousted Ettie and been unwilling to share Theo with other family members, to which Schreiner’s bracketed comment in the first extract above refers. In the same extract, Schreiner’s comment that Theo “has rather longed to see” Ettie relates to the fact that Theo and Ettie had rarely met or spoken after Stuart’s ‘claiming’ of him had occurred.

The second and third extracts, from letters to Fan and Will Schreiner respectively, concern Katie Stuart’s unwelcome interference in informing Will about Theo’s illness and Olive Schreiner’s response to this. Will Schreiner was under considerable strain at the time because acting as defence lawyer in the trumped up political trial of Dinizulu in Grey Town, Natal. Later in the same letter to him quoted from, Schreiner wrote that: “...your brain must not have the tiniest particle added to its weight....” (Olive Schreiner to Will Schreiner, 5 February 1909, UCT; OSLP Transcription). Stuart, however, wrote to tell Will regardless, taking charge of the flow of information as well as, as the third extract above shows, stifling the attempts made by Het (Ettie) and Alice Findlay (another of Katie Findlay’s daughters and so Katie Stuart’s sister) to be involved in Theo’s care. Schreiner’s strongly-worded comments here suggest her annoyance at this lack of consideration. In addition, they are connected with her further comment that



“all the evil poor old Theo has done he has been lead into by her”, which highlights Schreiner’s feelings about Stuart’s influence on Theo.

Fourthly, in the following two extracts from letters written in February 1920 to Fan Schreiner shortly after Theo Schreiner had died, Olive Schreiner comments on Katie Stuart’s more general separation of Theo from the rest of the family and Stuart’s epistolary activities around his death:

In the papers last Sunday I saw that old Theo had passed away. ... I wish Kate Stuart had not divided him so from all of us.

(Olive Schreiner to Fan Schreiner, 3 February 1920, UCT; OSLP Transcription)

I have got Kate Stuarts letter about dear old Theo’s death. It is quite beautiful if she had only left out that little bit at the end about her being left poorly provided for. Yes, one feels very grateful to her for having taken care of him.

(Olive Schreiner to Fan Schreiner, Sunday 22 February 1920, UCT; OSLP Transcription)

In the first extract here, Schreiner’s comment about Stuart dividing Theo “from all of us” indicates a firm sense of ‘us’ (the rest of the family) versus Stuart and to an extent Theo. In the second extract, Schreiner is even-handed, commenting on how “one feels very grateful to” Katie Stuart for taking care of Theo in his old age and final illness, while also suggesting that Katie Stuart had been unable to resist commenting in a rather resentful way about financial matters concerning his will.

While it is interesting that the comments by Olive Schreiner discussed above portray Katie Stuart fairly negatively, what is perhaps most striking is that there are no hesitations or apologies for portraying Stuart as a

‘mixed blessing’ to her correspondents. This matter of factness strongly implies that the family members she wrote to would not only understand what she meant by her comments, but also that her view of Stuart was shared with these other people.

## **Conclusion**

This discussion has been informed by the idea that letter exchanges are not always a replacement for, but are often in addition to, face-to-face meetings and are more generally written around real world referents. It has looked outwards to the wider Schreiner-Findlay family network from the viewpoint of a particular letter, and also looked in a detailed way at the words on the page to consider this letter’s rhetorical features and what these add up to. Focusing on the rhetorical devices used in the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter, a surface-level reading suggests Katie Stuart is simply fulfilling a family duty, while a more detailed reading suggests her strategising, and so this two-fold character of the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter needs to be reckoned with. Doing so also shows a complex interplay around public, private and political dimensions, with notions of intimacy and responsibility used to position relations in the family network and family politics and hierarchies also drawn on in doing so.

Overall, my discussion of the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter and the short extracts from some of Olive Schreiner’s letters has shown the importance of the referential aspects of these letters – there were real events, circumstances and people in relationships with each other outside of the text, and the

circulation of letters around these things occurred in real time and across real space. Also additional points regarding the letter-writer, including her construction of an epistolary persona and viewpoint, connect back to the maintenance and manipulation of family relationships and hierarchies outside the text.

My use of one particular letter to explore such matters requires comment regarding its utility for my purposes, and also its limitations concerning what kind of claims and generalisations I can make. In looking at one particular letter, I have read it in three rather different ways: firstly, in a surface-level referential way as an account of Katie Findlay and her circumstances; secondly, to engage with the letter's rhetorical devices and how these construct the particular viewpoint and persona of herself that Katie Stuart as letter-writer constructs; and thirdly and more briefly, to indicate how some other letters portray wider family relations with Stuart to consider how the 'dear ones' may have interpreted the letter at the time, and also compare my reading of the letter and this. This 'triple-take' reading has not only provided layers of detail to my interpretation, but also shown that each reading sheds light on the others. In other words, its constructed dimensions make a difference when reading the letter as referential of real-world matters, and also these real-world matters shape and condition the letter's constructed dimensions, and how Katie Stuart is portrayed in Olive Schreiner's letters to various people casts further light on these. In short, the discussion has shown that considering what a letter refers to, what it implies, who is it addressed to, and how these aspects are refracted through other letters, enables getting to grips with its many complexities.

Focusing on one letter has also enabled me to think about how the family epistolary network shapes up from the perspective of a particular letter-writer. It has shown the existence of possible groupings or cliques, unities and divisions, and through this the relationships between people in the family network have been made somewhat clearer, and doing so helps with understanding the workings of the network itself. Using one letter as a lens through which to explore such things has enabled me to consider in depth the perspectival dimensions of this letter by examining the viewpoint it is constructed from and the ways in which the persona of the letter-writer operates around this. And these points taken together show how this focus on one letter helps point up the interplays between referential and constructed dimensions of letters more generally, including regarding how perspectival dimensions and persona aspects are involved in this.

But of course working with just one letter also entails constraints concerning what kind of generalisations I can make. For instance, while I am able to explore in detail Katie Stuart's viewpoint and persona construction in it, and can support my interpretations of these by reference to some of Olive Schreiner's letters, I cannot establish whether or not these claims hold across Stuart's letters more widely, for this would require examination of her corpus of letter-writing as a whole. Also, I cannot be certain that other family members shared Schreiner's view about Stuart and her strategising, although this is strongly implied regarding some of them. In addition, there is a temporal gap between when Stuart wrote her 'Dear Ones!' letter and when the letters by Schreiner I quoted from were written, at its closest just over three years apart. Nevertheless, while direct responses

to Stuart's letter appear to be no longer extant, it might be possible to gain a sense of broader family viewpoints by reading across all the letters written by other members of the network. That said, this would be a very time-consuming undertaking and perhaps there are other 'across the network of letters' matters which are of more importance for understanding the family epistolary network than this.

There is a further constraint from focusing on one letter, which concerns what can be understood about the Schreiner-Findlay family epistolarium as a whole. Looking across a very large set of letters brings into view not only the activities of particular letter-writers over time and in relation to one another, but also an emerging picture of the structural properties of their letter-writing and also of the epistolarium itself (Dampier 2011; Stanley 2011a; Stanley and Dampier 2010). By taking one letter as a stand-alone object of study, it is not possible to speculate about the structural dimensions of the epistolarium, for such claims would have no satisfactory grounding – 'the data' would be insufficient. This points up a tricky tension between focusing in detail on particular letters, and investigating broader structures and themes across sets of letter more generally.

The 'Dear Ones!' letter has multiple addressees and makes explicit the fact that family letters often assume, even if they do not directly address, multiple readers. This is often so even when there is only one addressee, so the letter I have discussed is unusual more in its *explicit* multiple addressees than the mere fact of it being directed to a number of people. This letter consequently makes explicit what is usually implicit in family letters, that

they are not strictly private. Often they are circulated, read by more than one person, read in groups. Some letters or parts of letters may be designated as ‘private’, implying that the rest of the letters or the other parts of one letter are in some sense ‘public’. An epistolarium is not, then, solely about letters between individuals, and it is not a sealed unit of one person’s letters, but rather it interfaces with other letters and with the face-to-face, and hence concerns wider relationships among networks of connected people. Networks of course form a central part of social life and social relations, while epistolary networks in complex ways point up some of the workings of this sociality, such as how the ties between people and their relationships are managed around particular events and circumstances.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, my examination of the ‘Dear Ones!’ letter also exemplifies the Project’s idea that epistolary exchanges are frequently predicated on the continuation and maintenance of relationships around interrupted presence, rather than being a solution to a more permanent absence. While Katie Findlay’s physical absence from family members certainly extended for a lengthy period (Poustie 2011), Katie Stuart’s encouragement of the ‘dear ones’ to visit as well as write to her mother, aside from other things, indicates that her letter is based more on a kind of presence than complete absence. In other words, it was aimed at maintaining the presence of family members in Katie Findlay’s life rather than providing a kind of compensation for her absence (Stanley 2011b). This sense of presence operates from Katie Findlay’s side too, with her sending letters to family

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<sup>16</sup> See Hetherington (2011, this volume) with regard to epistolary networks around Schreiner’s friend Amy Levy’s death in 1889.

members to maintain her presence in their lives, however upsetting and unwelcome her letters may have been to some people. Moreover, it is perhaps also fair to say that, while for different reasons, Katie Findlay's physical absence from home placed her in a position which was not entirely different from other family members who were also living some distance from each another and maintained a sense of presence in each other's lives through exchanging letters punctuated by face-to-face meetings.

## **Appendix 'Dear Ones!' – see end of the Working Paper**

### **Acknowledgements**

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# **“I Am Too Much Shut In With the Personal”: Representations of Public Love and Private Death in the Case of Amy Levy**

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## **Introduction**

This paper is about the poet Amy Levy’s death on 10 September 1889<sup>17</sup> as it was perceived through contemporary documents, including in letters but also poems, obituaries and newspaper articles. The quotation in its title comes from a letter to Edward Carpenter written by Olive Schreiner which, among other things, comments on Levy’s death. They are Schreiner quoting what are perhaps the last words of Amy Levy, made in a response to Schreiner as a close friend. Levy’s death was variously termed suicide or self-killing and was perceived in some contrasting ways.

Amy Levy was an Anglo-Jewish writer and poet born in London in 1861. Educated at the prestigious Brighton High School for Girls followed by Newnham College, Cambridge, Levy developed a passion for and commitment to writing from an early age, and she became involved in both organisational and looser friendship networks in 1880s London. For instance, the attendance book of A Men and Women’s Club (1879-1885), a discussion group which preceded

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<sup>17</sup> The majority of literature about Amy Levy gives the date of her death as 10 September 1889 and this is the date on the death certificate also. However, the records at the Balls Pond Road Jewish Cemetery where Levy was buried state the date of death as 9 September 1889, and this date is also engraved on the headstone. This uncertainty about the actual date is surely because Levy died sometime during the night of 9/10 September alone in her room.

The Men and Women's Club (1885-89: see Bland 1995; Walkowitz 1986, 1992; Porter 2004; Dampier, this volume), shows Levy as a visitor early in 1882 and a member by the end of the year (Karl Pearson Papers 10/1). And, in terms of the less 'official' networks, she became close friends with many other women writers and translators of the time, such as Olive Schreiner, Eleanor Marx, Vernon Lee, Dollie Maitland and the sisters Constance and Clementina Black, among others (Beckman 2000; Pullen 2010).

My research engages with ideas about temporality and spatiality – when and where events take place; where writing 'happens'; how this is reflected in letters and others writings; and, how this reverberates in other times and spaces, in particular in feminist activities and networks prior to, and following on from, the 1880s (Hetherington 2010; Epstein Nord 1995; Freeman 2007; Huyssen 2003; Parsons 2003; Stratigakos 2008; Wilson 1991). These ideas are explored here around responses to the death of Amy Levy, with some comparisons made also with responses to the death of Eleanor Marx in 1898.

My research is closely connected with the Olive Schreiner Letters Project ([www.oliveschreiner.ed.ac.uk](http://www.oliveschreiner.ed.ac.uk)) in a number of ways, because of the inclusion in my work of selected letters written by and about Schreiner, but also because in part it focuses on Schreiner's emergent ideas particularly in relation to her involvement in feminist and socialist activities, and also her experiences of London as a city throughout the 1880s (First and Scott 1980; McClintock 1995; Berkman 1989; Burdett 2001). Schreiner's multifarious networks are of importance in my research, and like Amy Levy's networks, these extended across 'official' groups and looser friendship networks, all of which are

locatable in this particular time and space, but can be seen also to interconnect with other times and spaces, and including with each other. Overall then my research reconfigures 1880s London through an engagement with, and analysis of, the multi-perspective feminist imagination of this period (Walkowitz 1992; Wilson 1991; Bland 1995; Rowbotham 2010).

In order to do this, a number of important ideas developed by the Project are drawn on in exploring these women's writings, and particularly their letters. Firstly, working across women's writings in order to conceive of and explore their networks brings into play the existence of multiple epistolariums and the intersections between them (Stanley 2004, 2010). Secondly, letters as gifts and gift-giving accompanying letters are important in considering some of Amy Levy's epistolary exchanges (Mauss 1954; Strathern 1988; Stanley 2004, 2010b, 2011c; Hurdley 2007). And thirdly, re-reading is employed as a way of more broadly and rigorously contextualising some of the smaller details which have been utilised to make bigger claims (Sicher 2003; Hermes 2005; Dampier 2008; Stanley 2011b, this volume; Bellofiore & Fineschi 2009).

The death of Amy Levy was an event which 'happened', was written about, and had reverberations within the aforementioned network of women writers. It is refracted in documents of the time, such as letters, publications, dedications and obituaries published after Levy's death in, for instance, the *Women's Penny Paper* (21 September 1889), the *Lady's Pictorial* (21 September 1889) and the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 April 1892), which are discussed in more detail later. Also, Levy's death can be seen to have played a part in Olive Schreiner's late 1889 return to South Africa and her shift to the 'external world'

and ‘material things’, that is, to political and other outwardly concerns. This shift is seen here in relation and opposition to what Amy Levy expressed as inhabiting a kind of personal cocoon. Not one of comfort, however, but one which was isolating, disabling and fundamentally negating. In addition, the manner of her death also impacts on how Amy Levy has been represented subsequently, in more recent articles and biographies (including New 1993, Beckman 2000, 2004 and Pullen 2000, 2010).

Amy Levy, Eleanor Marx, Vernon Lee, Olive Schreiner and others were part of a broader network of women writers I am researching, and crossovers do occur into organisational networks also. So, for instance, when looking at the basis of the relationship between Levy and Marx it is necessary to consider The Men and Women’s Club, which both women were connected to, although in very different ways. These women’s relationships to each other varied in terms of intimacy and distance; some were of a more literary nature, some more strongly socialist; and there were changes over time. They also shared, to varying degrees, being ‘non-citizens’ of London, by which I mean some were neither born nor brought up in London, or spent time considerable time elsewhere, making their relationships to the city complex and nuanced. This was particularly so regarding Schreiner and Lee and includes their views on and depictions of city spaces. This includes, in a literal sense, late-Victorian private/public spheres and separations: the idea of ‘home’ (for instance, in relation to Schreiner’s many moves around London lodging houses as spaces of temporary residence); regarding the private study and the public streets (with Schreiner liking to walk around the city, making the outside (external) her thinking space as well as inside (internal) ones); and also in relation to public

transport (for instance, regarding Amy Levy's appreciation for the city transport systems, in poems such as her 'Ballade to the Omnibus'; (see New 1993: 386). And, less literally, it also includes more oblique, textual spaces related to the city. These encompassed textual spaces where love is expressed in a love (letter) poem, but in the public sphere as well as the private, so when it was published it lost its singular recipient, as with another Levy poem discussed later. And there are as well the public textual spaces in which death is represented, in Amy Levy's death certificate, obituaries and dedications, in terms of how such documents represent this individual's death and her life also.

### **The Death of Amy Levy**

I start discussing these matter by returning to a more detailed consideration of the letter from Olive Schreiner from which my title is derived:

"The sandals are quite perfect. I have already lent one to a woman who wants to have a pair made like them. But no others will be like them to me. I value them immensely.

I should have written yesterday but I had had a blow that somewhat unfitted me. My dear friend Amy Levy had died the night before. She killed herself by shutting herself up in a room with charcoal. We were away together for three days last week. But it did not seem to help her; her agony had gone past human help. The last thing I sent her was the Have Faith page of Towards Demo. She wrote me back a little note, 'Thank you, it is very beautiful, but philosophy can't help me. I am too much shut in with the personal' ...

^I send you an allegory of mine. Return; don't show to anyone else as it is only to appear in the Fortnightly next month.^"

(OS to Edward Carpenter, September 1889, Sheffield. Olive Schreiner Letters Project Transcription)



This letter from Schreiner to Carpenter interests me in particular in relation to epistolary ideas about the gift, last letters, and networks (Mauss 1954; Strathern 1988; Stanley 2004, 2010b, 2011c; Stanley & Dampier 2010). Schreiner's letter invokes the idea of the gift in a number of ways. It references four literal gifts, one from Edward Carpenter to Olive Schreiner (the sandals), one from Schreiner to an unnamed woman (sandals again), one from Schreiner to Amy Levy (the 'Have Faith' page of *Towards Democracy* written by Edward Carpenter), and one from Schreiner to Carpenter (the allegory to be published in the *Fortnightly Review*). Also, a fifth gift might be said to be the three days away which Olive Schreiner had spent with Amy Levy prior to her death, to try to cheer her up. This leads to gifts in relation to epistolary practice, such as giving-to-receive and turn-taking, and the extent of and obligatory nature of letter-writing (Stanley 2011b, c). Also, and what I find especially interesting about last letters, is that in a sense they are the only form of entirely altruistic letter-writing: the letter may be written with a sense of obligation to provide some information or message of recrimination or thanks, but with nothing being expected in return (Blanc 1987; de Silva 2000; Day-Lewis 1995<sup>18</sup>). In addition, it connects with a published love (letter) poem by Levy which I discuss later.

Although not a last letter in itself, Schreiner's letter to Carpenter acts as a 'marker' of last letters. It concerns the last letter which Olive Schreiner sent to Amy Levy; the last letter Levy sent to Schreiner; and the end of the correspondence between Schreiner and Levy. It also implies the end of

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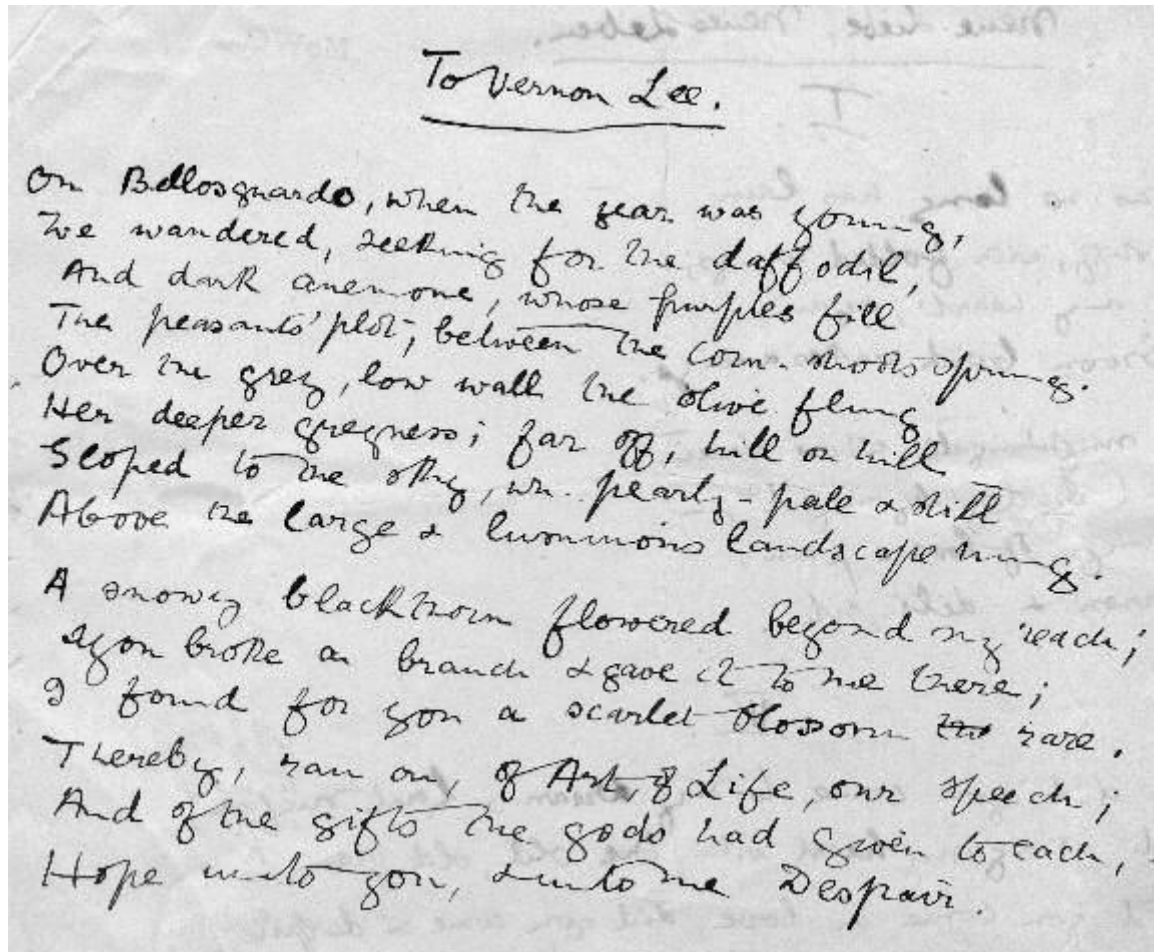
<sup>18</sup> These are edited collections of last letters which vary in terms of one-off letters written knowing death was possible or imminent, and collections of letters in the last year or so of a person's life. However, none of these collections consider last letters in relation to altruism or for their palimpsest qualities, which is what I am particularly interested in.

correspondences between Amy Levy and other people, including Vernon Lee, for instance. And, such ‘markers’ to last letters can be seen as particularly valuable and instructive since Levy apparently chose not to leave a final ‘suicide’ note (Pullen 2000: 54).

The death of Levy and its reverberations also occasioned breaks in the feminist network she was participant within and its inter-connected lives. One very important example of this for Schreiner scholarship is that it marked the shift from Amy Levy’s “too much shut up in the personal”, to Olive Schreiner’s post-1889 emphasis on the ‘external’ world and her preferred epistolary mode of a concern with ‘objective things’ (Stanley 2010a; Stanley 2011b, this volume). At the same time and interestingly, for Schreiner seemingly there was no need to pose questions around the whys and wherefores of Amy Levy’s death. The tone of her letter to Carpenter suggests it was a fact and its parameters known and in a sense almost expected, and this is very unlike Schreiner’s response to the death in 1898 of another of her close friends, Eleanor Marx, where she repeatedly inquired about the reasons for it.

There are however other explanations for Amy Levy’s death than her being ‘too much shut up in the personal’. There is, for instance, Pullen’s (2000, 2010) claim that Levy’s suicide followed her being made aware that Karl Pearson, founder of The Men and Women’s Club, had become engaged. Also, her death has been linked to the idea of an unrequited love for Vernon Lee (Beckman 2000: 208, 2004: 554; Colby 2003: 345 n. 6), which I now look at in relation to the love (letter) poem mentioned earlier, including around ideas about this as a gift.

*Love (letter) poem from Amy Levy to Vernon Lee, n.d., Colby*



To Vernon Lee

On Bellosguardo, when the year was young,  
We wandered, seeking for the daffodil  
And dark anemone, whose purples fill  
The peasant's plot, between the corn-shoots sprung.  
Over the grey, low wall the olive flung  
Her deeper greyness; far off, hill on hill  
Sloped to the sky, wh., pearly-pale & still  
Above the large & luminous landscape hung.

A snowy blackthorn flowered beyond my reach;  
You broke a branch & gave it to me there;  
I found for you a scarlet blossom ~~the~~ rare,  
Thereby, ran on, of Art, & Life, our speech;  
And of the gifts the gods had given to each, –  
Hope unto you, & unto me Despair.  
(AL to Vernon Lee, n.d., Colby, my transcription)

The Levy-Lee correspondence started in 1886, according to the extant letters, and commenced after Levy's trip to Florence where she had met Lee earlier the same year, a meeting which is referenced and remembered in the first lines of the poem. The poem was sent with a letter which Amy Levy wrote to Vernon Lee in November 1886, and it was then reworked for publication in the two weeks before Levy's death in September 1889. It is a kind of 'letterness' in poetic form, with Lee as a named addressee and there being clear epistolary intent (Altman 1982; Jolly & Stanley 2005; Stanley 2004; Poustie 2009). Also, there is a shift from there being a single (private) addressee when Levy sent it to Lee, and then there being a multiple (public) addressee or audience when it was published after Levy's death, involving the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private and multiple addressees (Jolly & Stanley 2005; Salter 2011b, this volume; Decker 1998).

This poem has been cited as signifying that Amy Levy was in love with Vernon Lee (Beckman 2000: 121; Nord 2003: 748). But if so, what kind of love was this? And what can an investigation into it tell of the relationship between Levy and Lee? In considering this, it is important to re-read 'To Vernon Lee' in a

broader context. The poem was originally sent to Vernon Lee not only with a letter, but also with a number of other poems for Lee to read and respond to, perhaps as a reviewer. Since Levy's death, however, it has been one small part of a much longer poem called *A London Plane-Tree*. Also, it is one of a significant number of other poems 'To' which were written by Levy, including 'To Clementina Black' for instance. And, in the broader context of Levy's letters, there are many similar mentions and expressions of appreciative affection for numerous other women, with the examples following all written after the poem 'To Vernon Lee':

"I went some time ago to see Miss Robinson; she is very charming, but hasn't the same personal attraction for me that Miss Blomfield has." (AL to Violet Paget, n.d., Colby, my transcription)

"I have met a striking person or twice lately – Laurence Tadema; there is so much "possibility" about her, to use an affected expression. She gives one such an impression of youth & innocence, & simplicity & strength ... And what sweet eyes!" (AL to Violet Paget, n.d., Colby, my transcription)

"I have been spending a few days with Dorothy Blomfield ... we talked hard all the time, & drove about in the rain, in a high dog-cart with a frisky horse. She is such a delightful creature." (AL to Violet Paget, n.d., Colby, my transcription)

Through considering this broader perspective regarding Levy's letter and poetic writings, I am led to question whether the poem was indeed a declaration of 'true love' from Levy to Lee, or whether it is better seen as a marker of a valuable and loving friendship.

Considering this poem in relation to the idea of the gift and re-framing it in these terms points up some interesting things, including in combination with

‘actual’ gift-giving (Stanley 2004, 2010b, 2011c; Hurdley 2007). It shows to some degree how Levy uses her letter-writing practice, not only to communicate what was going on in her life as a logging of events, but also and more subtly as a kind of offering, to propagate ideas and retain personal bonds. It broadens out the possibilities of how posted poetic writings can be viewed and contextualized, that is, not only as declarations of love but written for other purposes as well. Also, this kind of poetic epistolary practice contributes further to a blurring of boundaries between such literary forms as letters and poetry.

In Amy Levy’s epistolary practice, there is an awareness of letters-as-gifts, and also ‘actual gift-giving’ along with her letters. The reciprocity entailed, with ideas about roughly equal giving and receiving, are indicated in Levy’s comment that, “Our accounts (as regards letters) have got rather mixed, but as I am rather bored I will be generous” (AL to her sister Katie, 1888, Private Collection, my transcription). But at the same time, the backcloth of this generosity is that more giving than receiving could occur: “I have to thank you for two delightful letters; it really must have been a case of telepathy – I mean the crossing of ~~yr~~ ^the^ first of them, with mine” (AL to Vernon Lee, n.d., Colby, my transcription). In addition, along with her letters, Levy often enclosed ‘actual gifts’ sometimes in poetic form: “I send you some little verses of my own” (AL to Vernon Lee, November 26, Colby, my transcription). Also, her correspondents sent gifts to her, as in “You are simply too good to me. The flowers were like a breath of Florence wafted into one’s room; I had a distinct vision, when they came, of Parma violets ... & those fields on Bellosguardo with the anemones. Miss Blomfield & I owned to being quite overwhelmed ~~by~~ ^at^ the appearance of our respective boxes” (AL to Vernon Lee, n.d., Colby, my transcription).

These examples are interesting in relation to ideas about epistolary practice and gifts in a number of ways. In the first example, Levy is mildly berating her sister for not keeping to the unwritten rule of turn-taking where letter-writing is concerned. She is also, and not so subtly, asking for a response. In the second, Levy draws a close connection between herself and her correspondent Vernon Lee because their letters have crossed in time and space, adding more significance through their intuitive gift-giving without the need for turn-taking. The third example shows that even gifts in poetic form can need to be accompanied by a letter to explain what they are, although in this case Levy appears to be using the accompanying letter to define her gifts as ‘little’. And in the final example here, Levy thanks Lee for the gift of flowers which reminds her of their time in Florence, and she reiterates the first few lines from the poem ‘To Vernon Lee’ to indicate this. From the opening lines of this letter, it might be assumed that Lee is responding to Levy’s love (letter) poem specifically with her gift of flowers, until it becomes clear that Miss Blomfield has also received a similar gift from Lee.


There is also another way of considering Amy Levy’s death, which is how it was represented in some ‘public’ documents of the time. Those I consider are the death certificate, which provides a seemingly clear and succinct statement regarding Levy’s death, and obituaries and dedications along with some published works, which provide a rather more complex reading of her death. Together they lead to some interesting questions, including: How is a death represented in obituaries and dedications in terms of ‘summing up’ a life? What is Levy’s public persona as perceived from such documents? And, how are these representations continued in later publications, in biographies for example?

## Copy of Amy Levy's Death Certificate, Amy Levy Papers, Private Collection

**CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH**

statutory fee for this Certificate is 2s. 6d.  
if a search is necessary to find the entry, a  
fee for it is payable in addition.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, SOME



*Application*

**REGISTRATION DISTRICT** PANCRAS

1889 **DEATH in the Sub-District of** Tottenham Court **in the County of** Middlesex

(1) When and where died.	(2) Name and surname.	(3) Sex.	(4) Age.	(5) Rank or profession.	(6) Cause of death.	(7) Signature, description and residence of informant.
10th September 1889 7 Endsleigh Gardens	Amy Levy	Female	27 Years	a Spinster an Authoress	Asphyxia from the inhalation of Carbonic Oxide Gas from the of burning charcoal Suicide when of Unsound Mind	Certificate received from Geo. Danford Thomas Coroner for London Inquest held 12th September 1889

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.  
Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, SOMERSET HOUSE, LONDON, under the Seal of the said Office, the 8th day of November 1889

This Certificate is issued in pursuance of the Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1836 (6 & 7 Will. IV. c. 86), sec. 37 & 38. Section 38 provides that "A certificate of entry, purporting to be sealed or stamped with the seal of the General Register Office, shall be received as evidence of the birth, death or marriage to which it relates, without any further or other proof of such entry; and no certified copy purporting to be given in the said office shall be of any force or effect which is not sealed or stamped with the seal of the said office."

**179118** CAUTION.—Any person who (1) falsifies any of the particulars on this certificate, or (2) uses a falsified certificate as true, knowing it to be false, is liable to

As can be seen from the jpeg of the death certificate, Amy Levy died on 10 September 1889 at 7 Endsleigh Gardens, which was her family home. She was 27 years old and recorded as both a spinster and an authoress. The cause of death is said to be asphyxia from the inhalation of carbonic oxide gas from the burning of charcoal, interpreted as an act of ‘Suicide when of Unsound Mind.’ The language of the death certificate, aside from presenting a very limited one-dimensional view of an individual and her death, begs a number of questions: How for instance can it be ascertained that a person was of an unsound mind when they are already dead? What evidence is this conclusion based on? Why is ‘suicide’ seen as a measure of an individual’s mind in such negative terms rather than it being a considered choice to ‘kill



herself”? These queries really need further investigation. It has not, however, been possible to trace the inquest report to do so.

An article in the *Lady's Pictorial* (21 September 1889) acting as a kind of obituary provides a representation of Levy which is imbued with pathos – “in absolute loneliness, friends and family far from her, the sad end came” (358) – and it also includes a number of adduced reasons for her death, including rejection in Jewish circles, lack of bodily vigour and over-work, and a craving for human companionship. In summary, Levy is said to have had “an abnormally developed intellect [and a] literary ability [which] ripened too fast for her mental well-being” (358). Also, and interesting in view of a later *Pall Mall Gazette* article which I discuss below, Levy is said to have shared “the views upon religious belief of which her friend Miss Olive Schreiner has made”, and as “simple and trustful as a child [Levy] once more found her nature at deadly feud with her intellectual conclusions” (358). Much is made in this article of Levy’s state of mind around a tension between her intellectual strength (in her writing) and her intellectual weakness (in her life), and this is perhaps a reflection of the statement of ‘unsound mind’ in the death certificate.

In *The Woman's World* (1890), its editor Oscar Wilde’s dedication represents Levy largely through her literary life, and leaves out speculation about her death. There is, however, a focus on the sadder sections in stories by her which are published, such as when: “Xantippe on her death-bed relates the disappointment of her life”, and in a story “about a wasted and misunderstood love” (51). Wilde also chooses three of Levy’s more

melancholic poems which are printed in full in the journal, with the last two lines of each as follows: ‘Peace’: “I close my tired eyes – it were/ So simple not to wake” (7); ‘At Dawn’: “How shall I arise and face/ The empty day?” (65), and ‘The Promise of Sleep’: “The gentle Sleep, who promises/ That Death is gentle too” (547). Together, this collation of poems and fragments presents Levy as a woman with one thing on her mind, and fails to connect with other aspects of her character, particularly her humour and warmth, such as can be seen in, for example, an unpublished poem to her close friend Clementina Black: “Dear Clementina, take my story, /Altho’ your name, I’ve often said, /Not till indeed you’d gone to glory /Upon my fly-leaf should be read” (Amy Levy Papers, n.d., Private Collection, my transcription). Also, these writings were penned at different points in Levy’s life, not all at once, nor just prior to her death, as is implied by *The Woman’s World* collation. As such they actually mark the ups and downs of life, rather than a mind focussed only on the morose.

A later published *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 April 1892) article provided an explanation concerning a supposed suicide pact between Amy Levy and Olive Schreiner:

“Agreements to commit suicide are all very well but how can one party to such an agreement be sure that the other will keep it? ... [Such as when] two literary ladies were the actors. These authors - one of whom is widely famous - were spending a holiday at the seaside together, and both were indulging in very gloomy views of life. After discussing the question they both decided to commit suicide, and the younger hurried home and but too effectually carried out her purpose. The other happily thought better of the matter, and refused to fulfill her terms of the contract.”

(*Pall Mall Gazette*, 1 April 1892: 2)

The unknown author of this article speculates broadly about the conversations that went on between Schreiner and Levy while they were away, concluding that an agreement was made to commit suicide. It is impossible to know what these speculations were based upon, but the language used is very colourful: a ‘widely famous’ author, who ‘happily thought better’ and ‘refused to fulfill her terms’ is a portrayal which, summed up, reflects a dominant, controlling and neglectful older woman. On the other hand, the ‘younger’ who ‘hurried home’ and but too ‘effectually’ fulfilled the contract, reflects a more naïve and trustful woman who had come under the influence of the other.

Commenting on this article, which she cut out and sent with her letter, Olive Schreiner wrote to her friend and long-time correspondent Havelock Ellis:

“A funny idea has struck me about the enclosed cuttings, that perhaps I am meant!!! So many lies have been told about me already that now I wonder at nothing, ... What makes it likely that I am meant is that it is exactly the opposite of the truth, that I was ^always^ trying to cheer up Amy Levy (if it be intended for her,) & professing that I found life so delightful & worth living I’ve often felt since that if I’d been more sympathetic to her melancholy mood, I might have done more for her. In her last note to me she said, “You care for science & art & helping your fellow men, therefore life is worth living to ^you, to^ me it is worth nothing,” & the last thing I sent her was Ed Carpenters “Do Not Hurry, have faith.” which she sent back to me the night before her death with the words, “It might have helped me once it is too late now, philosophy cannot help me.””

(Olive Schreiner to Havelock Ellis, 23 April 1892, Texas. OSLP Transcription)

This letter to Ellis is a moving one in which Olive Schreiner reiterates what was in the letter Levy had sent to her, and also berates herself for not being sympathetic enough to Levy's mood, and not acting soon enough. It sits in opposition to the *Pall Mall Gazette* article in a number of ways. Firstly, that Levy said Schreiner cared for science and art and so on suggests that this is what they discussed together, and not the supposed pact to commit suicide. Secondly, that Schreiner sent Carpenter's essay called 'Do not hurry, have faith' to Levy conflicts with the claim that she somehow cajoled Levy into hurrying home to commit suicide. Thirdly, whilst Schreiner may not have been surprised by Levy's death, the sending of a gift (the essay), and the reciprocity this involved (the returning of the gift), as well as Schreiner's encouragement that life can be delightful, suggests she still had some hope for her friend. And fourthly, Levy's words as reiterated by Schreiner confirm their different position with regard to the latter's commitment to the 'external world' in comparison with Levy's 'internal' perspective.

There are also various references to last letters and returned gifts. In Schreiner's September 1889 letter to Edward Carpenter commented on earlier, there is Amy Levy's statement of thanks for a gift sent too late for her. In this April 1892 letter to Ellis, there is a sense of Olive Schreiner thinking she had not acted soon enough, producing a connection or form of dialogue between the two letters. And in both, there is Amy Levy's final declaration about a life not worth living, or rather a life 'worth nothing'.

However and as already mentioned, Olive Schreiner did not feel the need to question and in this sense investigate Levy's death, whereas the

death in 1898 of her closest friend Eleanor Marx occasioned a different response. Olive Schreiner and Eleanor Marx met in 1882 and had developed a close friendship throughout the 1880s. Their shared interests included a desire to ‘feminize’ ideas about labour developed by Karl Marx, Eleanor’s father, and also an appreciation of literature, such as that of Ibsen. Interestingly, Marx translated Amy Levy’s novel *Reuben Sachs* from English into German, and this translation was published in 1889, the year of Levy’s death. Indeed, Marx’s biographer Yvonne Kapp mysteriously suggests Eleanor Marx had “stronger reasons than personal friendship with the tragic young Amy Levy for Eleanor to take the unusual step of writing in a foreign language” (Kapp 1976: 260), perhaps implying a connection between the two women in terms of their relationships with their Anglo-Jewish identities at this time.

Eleanor Marx’s death left Olive Schreiner without a sense of closure for many years, as letters she wrote to another friend, the poet Dollie Radford, indicate. Around her late 1913 return to Europe from South Africa, Schreiner wrote to Radford that:

“I have wanted for so many years to see you ... If your house is close to the ~~train~~ ^omnibus^ perhaps I might run up when I have a little spare time & take my chance of finding you in. I am so uncertain as to health that I can’t make sure appointments.

I wonder if you would tell me anything about Eleanor Marx’s last years & death? No one I have ever met could. Did you see her near the end?”

(Olive Schreiner to Dollie Radford, 28 May 1914, NLSA, OSLP Transcription)

Sixteen years after the event, and seventeen years after Schreiner's last visit to England, she was still concerned with 'finding out'. The May 1914 meeting did not take place for health reasons, but soon after Schreiner wrote again:

"Please if you write after I've left this write there. I do long so to talk about Eleanor to you. I've never been able to hear a word about her last years from any one."

(Olive Schreiner to Dollie Radford, 28 June 1914, NLSA, OSLP Transcription)

Her choice of words – 'I do long so', 'I've never been able to hear a word' and 'No one could' – indicate both Schreiner's continuing need to know what happened and why, and also a sense of deliberate silence and a refusal to speak about Marx's suicide by others in the circle.

Further investigation into the differences, for Schreiner and perhaps for other friends too, between the deaths of Amy Levy and Eleanor Marx would shed light on both of these events in comparison to one another, and also on Schreiner's differing epistolary (and actual) relationships to Levy and Marx and also mutual friends she corresponded with.

Before concluding I want briefly to return to the three questions posited earlier, regarding how death is represented in obituaries and dedications in terms of 'summing up' a life, Levy's public persona as perceived through such documents, and how historical representations can be seen to continue in more recent publications. Historically, obituaries and dedications have been written by journalists who fail to capture anything of the 'life' of a person, by providing only the bare bones and being interested

in mainly favourable or else disreputable information (Starck 2001). In addition, Fowler (2004: 148) comments that “Obituaries should not be seen merely as homage to individuals but as part of a wider play of symbolic power.” Although I only mention three texts relating to Levy’s death in this paper, there are many more which were published, mainly in the weeks immediately following her death. When these documents are re-read as a collection, even though very few facts are given, they can be seen to ‘sum up’ Levy’s life very over-simply and often in only a few lines. Through a careful selection of events in her life, particularly related to her education and the publication of her writings, Levy is summarised as well-educated but emotionally and physically weak, as an unrealised literary genius whose life was engulfed with melancholy and whose weak demeanour led to an unfortunate and early death. This is put across through repetitive language in words and phrases such as ‘shy’, ‘tragic’, ‘gifted’, ‘promise’, ‘overwork’, ‘untimely death’ and ‘poor Miss Levy’. This ‘suicidal genius’ persona is seemingly further confirmed as a fact, through drawing on carefully selected fragments from her poems and other writings, as I have described earlier. Such repetition, according to Halldórsdóttir (2010: 44-45), can lead to a “‘truth’ of what happened [which is] echoed in the writings of most of those who have subsequently written” on an individual’s life. Indeed, there is an example of such a correlation between the contents of a past article and more recent comments about Amy Levy. This report in 1889 intimated something almost sinister, that Levy’s death “took place under more sad and tragic circumstances than have hitherto been made public” (*Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 19 September, 1889 p. 8). Similarly Beckman

(2000: 5) says that, following Levy's death, there was "an attempt to bolster [her] reputation in the face of a 'sordid' end for the sake of her literary reputation", but it is unclear what evidence if any this refers to. And, also similarly, Pullen (2000: 56) suggests that Levy's correspondence must have been heavily edited by her family immediately after her death, in order to suppress "that it was the breakdown of her friendship with Pearson that was the determining factor which ultimately drove her to suicide" with again no source for this 'editing' provided, simply that there is more to the story than meets the eye, rather than considering such letters may never have actually existed.

## **Conclusion**

There are three points I want to make in conclusion. Firstly, this paper is on one level concerned with the death (and life) of Amy Levy and focuses on this. But considering this has also involved discussing her connections with Olive Schreiner and Vernon Lee, as well as Schreiner's with Eleanor Marx and Dollie Radford, and so it provides a way of exploring how these women's lives met and departed in a variety of ways across a feminist network in 1880s London. It also connects with male friends and comrades such as Ellis and Carpenter, in terms of Schreiner's choice of correspondents regarding this event, and concerning the language she used in writing of it. There is, for instance, no need for Schreiner to say who Amy Levy is to Carpenter or Ellis, and from this we might presume they too knew Levy, either through meeting her or through Schreiner and



other third parties, as well as through Schreiner's letter-writing. This contributes to ideas about how Schreiner utilised her letter-writing in different ways, for different purposes, and to different correspondents.

Relatedly, by introducing a comparable 'event' – the death of Eleanor Marx – different *kinds* of relationships within the network can be seen more clearly, for instance between Schreiner and Carpenter, Schreiner and Ellis, and Schreiner and Radford. This is again in terms of Schreiner's letter-writing practices and who she writes to about what, in other words regarding her choice of correspondents and appropriate topics. And the very different circumstances pertaining around seemingly similar 'events', two deaths of women writers in late nineteenth century London, become more apparent through such a comparison, including differences such as the way an individual chooses to kill themselves, the time of day, and the presence and non presence of others (Levy chose suffocation alone in her room at night, whilst Marx's death was apparently mid morning and by taking prussic acid. I have been unable to locate inquest reports for either death). From this, for instance, the circumstances leading up to and surrounding each of these two deaths can be biographically and contestinally situated.

The point being made here is that the circumstances surrounding Amy Levy and her death confirm the interconnectedness of epistolary and other networks and that the epistolarium is consequently best thought of as porous and having very complicated borders between letter-writing and living. An exploration of 'Schreiner's network' is consequently seen as

involving a *series* of overlapping networks within which Schreiner's life and work were situated and can be explored.

Secondly, when thought of in connection with the concept of the gift and gift-giving, and turn-taking in relation to this, some important aspects of letterness come into view. Last letters tell of a life without worth, disrupted, challenged, and even, in the case of Amy Levy, negated. There were consequential reverberations of this for network members, because last letters represent a gift spurned or refused. In this sense last letters – whether actual or in palimpsest form as invoked in other letters, as with Levy's to Schreiner – are not end points as such, but points in a network's activities, which continue even after the death of one member. For instance, Levy's 'last letter' within Schreiner's letters to Carpenter and to Ellis begs the question of why Levy chose to write to Schreiner and return the gift of a letter in reply to one received, and also why she chose to leave no so-called suicide note. Gift-letters, such as Levy's love (letter) poem to Vernon Lee, can also be thought of as a reclaimed gift when, as was the case here, the letter-writer chose to re-situate a once private document within the public sphere by having it published. It may also have been usual for a writer such as Levy to know that her close friends, as Lee clearly was, would expect that a seemingly private poetic gift would become public property in published form. The fact that there was neither an epistolary gift nor a last letter regarding Eleanor Marx is perhaps of significance in relation to Schreiner's quest for information from Dollie Radford, although the destruction of letters between Schreiner and Marx makes this difficult to gauge. But

whatever its basis, Schreiner's epistolary response to the two deaths was different.

And thirdly, many kinds of once 'actual letters' appear in a palimpsest form within the framing of other letters, as with Amy Levy's response to Schreiner and Schreiner's to Levy, as this is inscribed in somewhat different ways in Schreiner's letters to Carpenter and Ellis. These epistolary palimpsests could provide multiple points for re-reading – or rather reading – excised or otherwise destroyed letters (Halldórsdóttir 2010). Also such palimpsests can be found in documents such as obituaries and newspaper articles, where the boundaries between letter-writing and journalism are blurred.

This opens up interesting analytical possibilities, because thinking in terms of palimpsest versions enables the many many destroyed letters written by, for example, Schreiner and Eleanor Marx among the network I am investigating, to be considered. On a conceptual level, doing so would enable consideration of the 'shadow-like' qualities and presences of other letters in extant letters, again complicating the boundaries and cross-over points between different epistolary networks and multi-epistolariums. And in relation to this, ideas about the bodily traces of others and co-presence may well prove useful (Decker 1998; Steedman 2001; Poustie 2011, this volume). On a substantive level, where no last letter exists, as in the case of Eleanor Marx, palimpsest versions of letters might begin to shed some light on the circumstances surrounding a death and also a life which Olive Schreiner among others was keen to comprehend. Overall, regarding any

epistolarium, there are always hints of many letters no longer in *actual* existence but which are, to varying degrees, locatable within the text of other letters. Palimpsest letters here would enable more of the contours of the epistolarium to be known, particularly its excised and no longer actually existent former components.

### **Collections**

Amy Levy Papers, Private Collection.

British Library, Colindale.

Hacker Papers, University College London.

Karl Pearson Papers, University College London.

Olive Schreiner Letters Project, University of Edinburgh.

Vernon Lee Collection, Colby College Special Collections, Waterville, Maine.

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# **“That Is Supposed To Be My Foot”: Letters, Bodies and Epistolary Co-Presence**

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## **Introduction**

This paper is concerned with the metaphysics of presence (Bernet & Brown, 1982; Derrida, 1970, 1976, 1987; Heidegger, 1995) in relation to the inscription of the bodily trace within letters. It discusses relevant examples from the correspondence of a number of people who were close or distant presences within the epistolary network(s) of Olive Schreiner and uses these examples to examine some of the theoretical and conceptual issues thrown up by letters and ‘letterness’ (Altman, 1982; Barton & Hall, 2000; Decker, 1998; Earle, 1999; Gerber, 2000; Jolly & Stanley, 2005; Poustie, 2010; Stanley, 2004, 2009, 2010, 2011b).

In doing so it explores how letter-writers, over varying degrees of temporal and spatial separation from their addressee, across international boundaries, or involving co-present individuals, use letters performatively to inscribe their body and create a sense of their physical presence. Bernet & Brown (1982: 88) suggest that:

“metaphysical concepts... generally crop up within the philosophical tradition in the form of pairs of concepts or conceptual oppositions such as presence and absence, essence and existence, substance and accident, real and imaginary, eternal and temporal and so forth...

Derrida...characterizes metaphysical thinking as a levelling or forgetting of the difference”

This forgetting or blurring of the differences between conceptual oppositions is apparent in many of the examples I discuss which suggest that absence and presence are interpreted by letter-writers and addressees within particular epistolary relationships, in a relationship-specific and interpretational way.

The letter-writers concerned are as follows. Emily Hobhouse campaigned for improved conditions in the concentration or internment camps Britain established during the South African War of 1899 to 1902 and was a member of many interconnected Schreiner social and epistolary networks (Van Reenan, 1984; Hobhouse Balme, 1994; Hall 2008). Despite her apparent good intentions, due to her rather impetuous, outspoken and frequently demanding conduct as evidenced in letters within and also outwith the Schreiner epistolary network, Hobhouse can fairly be described as an often exasperating but powerful ‘sort of’ friend of both Schreiner and Schreiner’s close friends Betty Molteno and Alice Greene. Betty Molteno, eldest daughter of Sir John Molteno, the first prime minister of South Africa’s Cape Colony, was headmistress of the Collegiate School for Girls in South Africa’s Port Elizabeth between 1889 and 1900 (Barham, 2007), and one of Schreiner’s closest friends. Alice Greene was an English migrant who taught at the Collegiate School from 1887, later becoming Betty Molteno’s life-partner and subsequently herself developing a close friendship with and admiration for Schreiner (Barham, 2007, 2010). Clare Goodlatte was a teaching colleague of Molteno and Greene and resident at the Collegiate School. Also included are letters from Zoe

Findlay to her father Hudson Findlay, and between George Findlay, son of Hudson, and his friend Beryl (surname unknown), with the Findlay family having multiple familial and friendship connections with the Schreiners (Findlay, 1954; Salter, 2011, this volume).

I shall draw on some particular examples of letters to examine how the inscription of the bodily trace in them works so as to create a sense of presence. The idea of the epistolarium is particularly relevant to what follows. The epistolarium is concerned with the analysis of epistolarity and epistolary exchanges written by a particular person and “tailored for the particular addressee” (Stanley & Dampier 2010: 61; see also Stanley, 2004, 2009, 2011b) in their socio-historical context, rather than their letters in any narrow sense. My particular take on the term ‘letterness’ (Poustie 2010) is that letters frequently push at and play with definitional boundaries and it is more useful to think of an individual’s epistolary output as having a variety of aspects of letterness. This allows actual letter-writing to shape conceptualizations, rather than trying to fit letter-writing into existing and sometimes confining conceptual boxes concerning what a letter by definition ‘is’, at the loss of a more expansive, perspectival and ‘to the letter’ analysis.

The idea of the epistolarium also recognises that someone’s epistolary outputs interleave with and are influenced by the letter-writing of other people from multiply interconnected networks (epistolary, social, familial, political and so on), and resultantly are not written and exchanged solely to maintain a relationship between separated individuals but have what Stanley (2009: 11) describes as “quotidian qualities... to maintain the ordinary everyday fabric of

social relations”. Examples to illustrate this point include letters like ‘I owe you £10’, or notes to partners (or the self) such as ‘Get milk’. In accordance with prevailing social conventions, letters in the Schreiner networks were often shared by the addressee with other members<sup>19</sup> by forwarding extracts or entire letters within and across these overlapping networks. The traversing or blurring of public and private is a quotidian quality characteristic of the Schreiner epistolarium (Stanley, 2011, 2010; Stanley & Dampier, 2010) while the example of Miss Goodlatte’s letter to Betty Molteno discussed later was actually read and responded to by someone other than the intended addressee (by Alice Greene and not Betty Molteno) suggesting this has wider remit.

Focusing as it does on the specificity of all the epistolary relationships which comprise it, the concept of the epistolarium also allows for a qualitative analysis of patterns of reciprocity in letter-exchanges. Quantitative measures of reciprocity (such as Mr X sent 30 letters to Mr Y who replied twice) do not reveal much that is analytically useful about the import or value of each letter to those in the epistolary exchange, with the relative and subjectively perceived value of each letter part of a reciprocal exchange of epistolary gifts (Stanley, 2009, 2011b) discussed further below. As Stanley (2009: 13) states “who gives, and who receives matters” and the intersubjectively originating perceptions of people within the specific epistolary relationships are central in the discussion and analysis of the following examples.

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<sup>19</sup> Letters can also be forwarded to ‘outsiders’ or non-members of epistolary and social networks to positive or negative effect. See Poustie (2010) for the development of the concept of ‘arrogating’ epistolary connections outwith existing networks.

Instead of ‘the letter’, then, I am more concerned with letterness, by which mean I aspects of writing that draw upon or play with broadly established conventional, theoretical and conceptual features of letters. Of course, this must be considered from the perspective of the letter-writer within their contextual circumstances. A fictional example here is Mary Shelley’s (1999[1818]) *Frankenstein*, written in the form of letters from voyager Robert Walton to his sister Mrs Saville, as well as an enclosed manuscript, which gives a narrative account of the tormented life and death of Victor Frankenstein following his creation of ‘the Creature’. Issues of epistolary performance and reciprocity are also involved as well as the perspectival, dialogical and referential nature of letterness, its real world connections, and its complex temporal aspects (Jolly & Stanley, 2005: 78-9). In addition, reciprocity is an inherent feature of ‘letterness’, in that the action of writing elicits some kind of response, whether a reciprocal piece of writing, a phone call, a visit and so on, and such reciprocity and its relative ‘value’ is subjectively and contextually specific and not simply quantifiable as a ‘one for one’ exchange of letters. An example discussed in more detail later was written to a deceased addressee (Alice Greene), who would not have received the letter in any conventional sense, although it still draws on many of the features of dialogical exchanges discussed by Jolly & Stanley (2005) including that of perceived reciprocity on the part of the letter-writer.

To paraphrase Altman (1982) on letters and Stanley (2004) on the epistolarium, ‘a letter’ is simply the use of a letter’s formal properties to create meaning (for a known or unknown audience), regardless of the medium or communication technology, or relative spatial distance or temporal remove

between writer and reader. However, this does not mean that all writing can or should be considered as ‘a letter’. Whilst the absence of things such as a date, a salutation, a signature or an address do not affect the ‘letterness’ aspects of epistolarity (and many conventions pertaining to these aspects shift over time and between cultures), a letter is a communication from a signatory to an addressee (and this can include letters from and to the letter-writers ‘self’) over varying degrees of temporal and/or physical separation and in a representational form (whether writing, or one of its proxies). To complicate matters further, whilst the intended recipient is usually known to the letter-writer, letters are often read by unintended audiences (including for instance my reading and interpretation of the letters cited and extracted in this paper). Also, as in the case of open letters such as to a newspaper, letters are often written in the knowledge they will be read by unknown eyes. The point here is that letters and other representational forms are written with intent to communicate and are intended to be read by a recipient of some kind, and whether the addressee was distant or not.

Letters can also be the result of interrupted presence, rather than just a solution to absence. They can be written between individuals who have never or will never meet, but equally so they can be exchanged by people who are apart for very short periods – or who are even in the same house or room. An example of the latter is ‘I luv u’, words sometimes written in steam in the mirror by my partner while we are both in the bathroom, which shows very specific epistolary selection and intent over that of the spoken word. Notes and cards are of course frequently exchanged between co-present individuals for a number of reasons such as birthdays and public festivals. This is however often

ignored phenomenon in epistolary theory, which by and large assumes that geographical distance and physical absence are necessary prerequisites for epistolary exchange (Decker, 1998; Gerber, 2000; Jolly, 2008). Resultantly, the focus is predominantly on separated individuals (such as migrants), and around the function of letters in maintaining network connections across physical divides (albeit sometimes interspersed by face-to-face encounters) (Fitzpatrick, 1994; Cancian, 2010). Much of the literature in this area examines how letter-writers try to overcome physical distances by creating and maintaining a sense of connectedness and intimacy with absent addressees.

Inscription of the bodily trace is one interesting technique used by letter-writers to create a sense of their presence across spatial and temporal removes, although it also occurs across a range of examples including where spatial and temporal distance is narrowed to that of co-presence. Letters are not solely “an expression of physical distance” (Jolly, 2008: 108), then, but are frequently written between co-present letter-writers and addressees, and writing strategies such as inscription of the bodily trace, often assumed to be employed solely to overcome physical distance or separation, are used in situations of both “presence and absence” (Bernet & Brown, 1982: 88).

But why should co-present individuals opt to write letters rather than use the spoken word? In exploring this, I shall discuss how and why some letter-writers inscribe the bodily trace when (unlike spatially and/or temporally separated individuals) they are already physically ‘there’ in the ‘here and now’ of the addressee.



## Letters, Co-Presence and the Bodily Trace

Following her return from South Africa in early 1914, Emily Hobhouse, in a letter to Alice Greene dated 20 May 1914, emphasized the value of a letter she had received from Greene and how she takes pleasure in an act of epistolary reciprocity which was not confined to fulfilling a “sense of payment due”, as she describes it. Hobhouse also suggests that letters take the place of “fleshly companionship” and compares tearing up a letter to tearing someone you love to pieces:

c/o Barclay & Co  
137 Brompton Road  
London. S.W.  
May 20.14

Dear Miss Greene

Your letter was a delight to me, & brought back to me the atmosphere of the past six months, the first letter from Cape folk, & you are, after all, not Cape. No – this is not a duty letter written under a rigid sense of payment due. Far from it, and it never would be to you. Please don’t think so.

Certainly the physical effort of letter writing is great to me, but the mental exercise is delightful when one is writing to those friends to whom one lets one’s pen run on like talking without thought of grammar or even perhaps sense!

And more – in the lives of quite solitary people receiving & writing letters takes place of fleshly companionship - & most days forms one’s only mental give & take, outside of books – and this I feel so strongly that the habit has been growing upon me more and more of late to keep all my friends letters even if I don’t read them often, it feels almost like murdering an individual ^you love to tear them into pieces^!!!

I have subsided into a dingy Oxford lodging – Oxford, because I came here to visit to friends & found it suited my invalid ways so much better than London that I decided to stay on to be near two undergraduate nephews & many other young & old, male & female – Oxford is lovely in May... You were mistaken to lose this spring in England, - it has been the sort that poets write about... (EH to AG, 20 May 1914, UCT)

This letter explicitly acknowledges implicit conventions of reciprocity, turn-taking and gift exchange, all of which are important if an epistolary dialogical exchange is to continue and be maintained. This is not to say that all letters require a reply for an epistolary relationship to continue, as this is not necessarily the case; and each letter, its content, its relative value, and the need to respond or not will be evaluated by those in the epistolary relationship in question. Hobhouse here implies not only that the value of Greene's letter is considerable to her, but also that her own reply should be perceived as such too, because it is written out of something more than a "sense of payment due", and also because of the "physical effort" that letter-writing is to her. However, Hobhouse also indicates that the opportunity to reply is a welcome gift allowing her in her solitude to do something "like talking". This suggests that, even if the bodily trace is not explicitly inscribed by the letter-writer, and regardless of the geographical, temporal or figurative distance between the letter-writer and addressee, the materiality of the document itself inscribes the bodily trace implicitly. The idea that letters inscribe authorial embodiment and have an implicit figural identification with the letter-writer's body remains prevalent in literature on the genre. Cook (1996: 2) for example asserts that "original, personal documents [and] handwritten letters, bear... traces of the body that produced them in inkblots, teardrops, erasures, revisions" and Decker (1998: 41) discusses how material letters can possess "a physicality of a piece with the body that shaped it".

The implicit association of a material letter with the letter-writer's body creates an enduring sense of the letter-writer's presence over time, even beyond

their death and for as long as the letter itself survives. In line with Steedman's (2001: 74) perception that "[t]he letter is part of the body which is detachable: torn from the very depths of the subject", this example suggests that, as a proxy for "fleshy companionship", the letter itself is perceived by Hobhouse as a piece of the sender that materially stands for the letter-writer in their absence and literally survives beyond their death. A letter, implies Hobhouse, is an (epistolary) piece of the sender's self/body that is perceived to 'live' independently of, and temporally beyond, the sender and this is implicitly indicated by her phrase "feels almost like murder... to tear them to pieces".

In the next example, George Findlay was sent a letter dated 11 March 1919 from someone called Beryl, whose surname and precise connection to George is unknown but who seems to have been a college (girl)friend with a romantic interest in George. This letter has an interesting dual and repeated focus on the bodily trace and on real time events as they occur. Beryl wrote to George Findlay and interrupted her letter, which appears in full here, to draw a squiggle representing her bodily movements symbolically.

"[unreadable]"

Umkomaas

11.3.19.

George dear –

Thank you so much for your letter which I received yesterday. You are indeed a dear to have written so soon. – I sent you a postcard last week which you must have ere this.

I'm making no excuses for the pencil scribble 'cos I'm blessed if I'm going to write in ink whilst on a holiday.

It is only half past eight and I'm in bed – balancing a candle (you see you're not the only people using candles these days) on the one knee – and the writing pad on the other. I tell you it is quite a clever feat. Every now and then I have to clutch the candle with the one hand while with the other I bang against the wall attempting to catch mosquitoes (Is that spelt correctly?) Of course every time I bang I say a swear word, and every time I say it the blimey pad slips onto the floor. – Oh! You'd enjoy yourself if you were here to see old Beryl now. – Talking about mosquitoes. – You should see my legs. That sounds rather funny “eh” but I mean you should see the bites on my legs. - Some of the mosquitoes are as large as cows (don't laugh) and they leave huge lumps as large as sixpences. Just a minute —

My left foot has gone to sleep~~~~~  
~~~~~  
~~~~~That is supposed to be my foot wiggling about. – At any rate the “needles and pins” feeling has disappeared.

This life suits me beautifully. All I do is bathe – EAT (in capitals) and sleep. – I hope to be as fat as a pig when I return to Pretoria. I'm afraid that I'll be such a size that you'll be afraid to ask me to sit “achtenop” your motor.

I'm glad to see you do miss me a bit – only I should have been perfectly happy if you'd written and told me you were perfectly miserable without me. Swine!! But then – if you'd written that I shouldn't have believed you.

My friend Littlewood is brushing her teeth this time of the night. - Some people are guys - aren't they?- She hasn't come to bed yet but she just came into the room for a few minutes to powder her face – brush her teeth and put lypsyl on her lips. I'm positive she is about to go and kiss some youth – I know the symptoms well. There is no one at Umkomaas I'd like to kiss. Now if a certain fair person from Room 175 Union Buildings had been here – who knows I may also have come to powder – lypsyl – and brush teeth. Don't for one minute imagine I mean you 'cos it is Thacky I'm referring to. (I can see you smiling, you hound.) (Yes! I own up. I mean you. I must bid thee adieu now.

Kindest regards to Thacky. And to you I send the kiss you were too modest (I don't think) to take the day I left.

Beryl

You'll write again the minute (never mind the Income Tax summonses) you receive this - won't you?

(B to GF, 11 March 1919, WCL)

The representation and shared knowledge of an internal bodily sensation in this letter of a foot ‘going to sleep’ transcends words alone and invokes the “imaginative sympathy” (Schneider, 2000: 33) of the addressee. It creates an “effect of immediacy” (Stewart, 1982: 188-9) and a sense of “presence” that plays with the constraints of the epistolary medium by using the squiggly line to represent Beryl’s ‘real time’ bodily movements during the act of writing the letter. It provides some interpretative social cues regarding body language normally available during face-to-face communication, but not during a temporary or longer-term distanced “conversation of pens” (Gerber, 2005: 317; see also McCracken, 2010). Beryl also imaginatively creates George’s responsive body language on reading the letter, as indicated by the phrase “I can see you smiling”, with various techniques of creating shared experiences across physical and temporal distances being deployed in letters (McCracken 2010). Temporally, this is very complex, as this body language of and ‘seeing you smiling’ is projected in the letter for the moment of George’s future reading of it, and is built into the imaginary conversation which Beryl is conducting with him in her present, as she writes.

By employing these strategies and repeatedly referring to what is happening in her real time, including the explicit reference to “I’m in bed, holding a candle” and “half past eight”, the letter-writer inscribes a direct connection to her ‘moment of writing’ (Stanley & Dampier, 2006). However, upon its receipt, reading and every subsequent re-reading of the letter by the addressee (or indeed any future reader), this connection is recurrently formed between a specific moment in the letter-writer’s past but in the reader’s

immediate present. This is so powerful that a re(connection) to Beryl's 'moment of writing' occurs every time this letter is read by the intended addressee and also its present readers. As the Hobhouse example indicates, this material 'piece' of the writer is fixed in a specific moment in epistolary time, where Beryl (who in the moment of my writing and later, your reading, this present paper is long dead) sits with her candle and notepad in a college room while her roommate brushes her teeth. Regardless of the passage of time and changes that may occur in the relationship between writer and addressee, (re)reading this letter in a sense transports the reader back to Beryl's specific moment of writing, which is a particular moment in her (epistolary) relationship with George, and which becomes her past as soon as it is written, but which on reading and subsequent re-readings is always the reader's present.

In addition to the implicit bodily trace in letters such as the Hobhouse example above, explicit inscriptions or representations of the bodily trace such as Beryl's squiggly line work to create a two-fold sense of presence and intimacy, both implicitly and explicitly. In this example, the boundaries of the writing medium are played with, creating an imaginative connection between letter-writer and addressee and a sense of both immediacy and bodily presence despite the physical and temporal separation between Beryl and George. However, this has highly complex temporal effects across time, by creating a sense of co-presence and connecting and reconnecting writer and reader, even those readers reading the letter over ninety years later, to a specific moment in the letter-writer's life and past, in this case even after their death.

Betty Molteno, Schreiner's close friend from 1890 on, corresponded with her life-partner Alice Greene everyday they were apart. Such a correspondence existed for some weeks after Greene's death, and the use of phrases such as "it is 4 weeks since you went into the Beyond... For days I've not written to you" in my next example shows how Molteno maintained what I propose was still a 'dialogical epistolary exchange' of a kind. The letter's very existence shows a preference for the epistolary medium over the spoken word, perhaps due to the tangible materiality of the written document as discussed regarding the Hobhouse letter earlier. And, despite there being no chance of reciprocity in the convention sense of the term, it still draws on many characteristics of letterness discussed above:

High View [*unreadable*]

1.30 pm

Wednesday Feb 24/20<sup>20</sup>

O, Lovely Love. Today it is 4 weeks since you went into the Beyond. This is the hour at which you went. For days I've not written to you. I've been impelled to do other things, and now the past few days threaten to become hazy.

I wrote to you last on Thursday Feb 19. Friday is almost a blank but I think I went in the afternoon to [*unreadable*] House & had a wonderful time with Mrs Saunders, when she told me of a strange experience just after her mother passed over & before her body was put into the Earth – For 40 years I have studied Spiritualisation's she said. She gave me Stanton Moses "Spirit Messages" to read, and Saturday & Sunday I was lost in them, remaining much at home in my bed to read them, and not remembering until Sunday afternoon that I was to have tea with Miss Oliving – Got Miss Cocks to walk with me to church. Stood by the mound on which shone your golden daffodils & then went into the

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<sup>20</sup> The Wednesday was actually 25 February 1920.

church with Miss Cocks. Spoke to Miss O on coming out & apologized ~~for~~ explained my non-arrival to tea. They had waited for me but she said she understood – Walked back in a night of marvellous beauty calling on the Taylors on our way back. – O Jove! Such a sunset sky, such a moon, crescent & luminous, alive like the ^gold^ lunettes found at Harley [unreadable] O The Stars. What are you now experiencing from [unreadable] now doing – O the wonder of that night and the mound with its golden daffodils lying under that vault of moon & stars in St [unreadable] God's [unreadable].

And now Saturday afternoon comes back to me – Stanton Moses' book was read in the afternoon I took it back to [unreadable] House & asked Mrs Saunders for another book. She fetched "Isis Unveiled"<sup>21</sup> or rather went to her husbands study to get it & the strange fascinating old gentleman brought it to me himself. What a Magician I find him! And what powerful life-giving vibrations [unreadable] from him and what electricity he evokes in me! I was reminded of the electric encounter with Smutts you witnessed in Polly's studios, more than two years back. He is a member of the Psychical Society which was founded about 1882 and he was busy [unreadable] for years doing independent research work. He has not read "Isis Unveiled", & does not think it will help me. I worked at it in bed on Sunday. On Monday came one of those marvellous days, & I walked in the rich sunshine into Padstow – [unreadable] now by you. I wore your American shoes darling, those you got in Cape Town I believe and the lame leg so appreciated them, I walked so much better - ate oranges on the Pier where you so often sat – watched the "Rhoda Mary" at Falmouth but recently arrived from [unreadable] unloading coal for [unreadable] – at – 2 oclock did my [unreadable unreadable] – then to [unreadable] ^Parker's^ to try & get coal. None has come for them. Two dreams of you, Beloved – The first night I saw you lying in the midst of ferns, flowers, but do not recollect what flowers. I could not touch you – nor get you to come away with me. But when I awoke I felt so glad to have seen you... (original emphasis) (BM to AG, 24 February 1920, UCT)

This letter, dated 24 February 1920, was written by Betty Molteno four weeks after Alice Greene's death. Stanley (2004: 209) defines an epistolary exchange

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<sup>21</sup> Blavatsky (1877) is on esoteric philosophy and supports the existence of spiritual phenomena claiming that science is as dogmatic as religion in its denial of these phenomena without having proof to the contrary.



as a “correspondence [that] persist[s] over time” and this is applicable to this example if the exchange is considered in a more perspectival, relational and contextual sense. For instance, Molteno’s letter apologises for and explains its lateness, conveys information and news, and directs this to a named addressee perceived as reciprocating by receiving and communicating in non-material ways. It also presumes response, albeit of an out of the ordinary kind.

In Molteno’s letter, notions of distance and absence are subjectively constructed with Molteno perceiving that Alice Greene continued to communicate with her by spiritual means. Consequently reciprocity is constructed around Greene’s perceived spiritual communicativeness, which enables this exchange to continue despite the fact that conventional or physically material forms of reciprocity could not occur. The letter in fact has clear and purposeful epistolary intent and the fundamental characteristics of letterness noted previously. It forms part of an ongoing dialogical correspondence “with reciprocity built in” (Jolly & Stanley, 2005: 78-9). Additionally, the drawing upon of relational characteristics, referential aspects and ‘real-world’ connections (Jolly & Stanley, 2005: 78-9) are apparent in Molteno’s image of her sitting where Greene once sat, thus creating complex temporal, spatial, and bodily connections between letter-writer and the addressee. In Betty Molteno’s post-mortem letter to Alice Greene, Greene is perceived to remain almost co-present. Molteno’s epistolary intent is evident and the reciprocity perceived by her as existing makes this example part of a dialogical exchange that inscribes the bodily trace in extremely fascinating but very complex ways.

The next example to be discussed is a letter to Hudson Findlay from his daughter and “loving girlie” Zoe. It symbolically represents the physical acts of kissing and hugging by using ‘X’ and ‘O’ respectively. The representation of hugs by ‘O’ is made explicit in a previous letter from Zoe to her father, dated 5 February 1904 which ends “XXXXXXO,OOXO hugs”. The letter, dated 11 February 1904, begins and ends as follows:

Lyndall

Sunnyside

Pretoria

[unreadable]

Feb 9<sup>th</sup> O4

Dearest Daddie,

I received your nice long letter last night [unreadable] You must know it is the first one I’ve had since we came from home. I will keep on writing even if you don’t answer them because I know you have lots of work to do it would do you a world of good to come down here it is so nice [...] we are all longing to see you – Is the little cottage at Rietfontien ours it will be rather fun to live out there. George Baba & Mammie are all well. Grannie has gone to Darling to stay with Mrs v.d [unreadable] & we miss her very much – this is not a long letter at all but I will write often & tell you all the news love to all & a lot for yourself XXXXXOO  
I remain

Your loving girlie

Zoe.Findlay

(ZF to HF, 11 February 1904, Cullen)

This letter from Zoe to her father represents the bodily trace in a different way from Beryl’s representation of her wiggling foot. In Zoe’s letter, the bodily trace inscribed is not a representation of her ‘now’, that is, the ‘moment of writing’, but instead represents in a playful epistolary way a shared bodily experience she both misses and desires when eventually reunited with her Father. In this way, the bodily trace inscribed is an evocation of physical

sensational and also emotional experiences both past and future but not present. The material act referred to symbolises the emotional bond, and at the same time the ‘X’ and ‘O’ symbolise both. Zoe’s inscription of hugs and kisses push at the boundaries of the medium of writing and implicitly suggest her frustration both with its limitations and with the prolonged absence of someone whose physical presence and touch she wants.

Despite the child-like nature of this letter, Zoe’s handling of the issue of epistolary reciprocity is mature and philosophical. Her assurance that her Father would write if he could is sufficient for her to maintain the epistolary relationship even if he does not respond, again highlighting the fact that reciprocity is not something quantifiable by someone ‘outside’ of the relationship, nor is it to be measured quantitatively. Her letter also shows that the value or import of a letter is dependant of the contextual circumstances of the letter-writer and as perceived by the addressee for, when her Father does write to her, Zoe’s awareness (indicated by her comment “I know you have lots of work to do”) that time has been taken from other important tasks to give to writing to her enhances the value of his letter as a gift (Stanley, 2011b, 2009, Stanley & Dampier, 2010).

In the next letter, Miss Goodlatte, a colleague of Molteno and Greene, writes to Molteno as the Port Elizabeth Girls Collegiate School headmistress, apparently upset that her ill-health and resultant inability to take walks with the schoolchildren under her care might have been perceived as ‘shirking’ by her colleagues:

Tuesday evening

My dear Miss Molteno,

I think it is quite possible that I may be unable to resume my walks at present, & though I am very sorry to give anyone additional work, you must permit me to remind you that Miss Green, Miss Williamson & myself took two walks a week for long after we joined the school, & I don't know that anyone felt it necessary to pity us very much.

I am not given to shirk-ing my work, but I can't run the risk of laying , myself up for years [~~unreadable~~]by walking just now \_ If you would prefer a certificate of my inability, I have no doubt that Dr Edwards will supply one.

Regretting deeply that I am forced to trouble you in the matter,  
I remain

Yours faithfully  
Clare R. Goodlatte  
(CG to BM, Tuesday nd, UCT)

This letter was written by one colleague responsible for physical education and school walks, and sent to another, a superior, residing in same house. The socio-historic and cultural norms and conventions of politeness and formality, both of the time and of those established internally by the women teachers resident at the Collegiate School, have to be taken into consideration here. As already indicated, Greene and Molteno were prolific letter-writers and the formality of the situation involving either the upward referral of a teacher's grievance to her headteacher, or the teacher covering her back in case of complaint, will have influenced Clare Goodlatte's selection of an epistolary medium in lieu of addressing the matter face-to-face.

The point I am making here is that Goodlatte and Molteno could easily, given their co-residence, have spoken face-to-face, but Goodlatte elected not to do so. There are also contemporary instances in which epistolary or other alternative mediums are chosen instead of face-to-face or verbal

communication, for instance, for reasons of formality, or to negotiate awkward social circumstances or situations. Examples here include the clichéd saying sorry with flowers or the ‘dumping’ of a girl or boyfriend by text on mobile phone. It is possible that Goodlatte opted for an epistolary medium as a matter of preference, and that using an epistolary medium influenced what she felt at liberty or perhaps emboldened to ‘say’.

Goodlatte’s letter refers to and uses the bodily trace in a number of ways, referring to: what her material body *has done*, namely served loyally in the past by taking “two walks a week for long after I joined the school” without invoking any “pity” or by inference, thanks either; what it *can do*, in terms of proving its inability and need of respite to a doctor and its potential to continuing working effectively if respite is granted; and, what it *cannot do*, namely exert itself further without causing damage or “laying myself up for years”. This inscription of Goodlatte’s body reads as a kind of defence as a result of her sense of being placed on trial, both physically (by exertions) and metaphorically (by unalluded-to colleagues). She emphasises not only her previous good conduct and character, but also her ability to supply evidence and her regret for the ‘trouble’ involved. Goodlatte’s body and a problem with it in terms of her work requirements has forced this epistolary event. The bodily trace is inscribed in the letter in a number of ways, but materially Goodlatte has elected to remove her body from a potential face-to-face encounter and instead represent it in an epistolary medium to considerable effect.

The examples I have discussed suggest that a sense of the bodily presence of the letter-writer is an inherent and implicit quality of letters due to their very being as tangible and material ‘things’, or what Baudrillard (1994[1981]) refers to as simulacra of presence. The Hobhouse example indicates that letters can be perceived as a living or surviving simulacrum of the letter-writer’s body, a ‘piece’ of them, even where the writer themselves is long dead. Subsequently, death does not necessarily end an epistolary relationship, as the example from Betty Molteno to her deceased love Alice Greene demonstrates. This example, and that of Zoe Findlay in her assertion to her father that she will continue to write irrespective of whether he replies, demonstrate that reciprocity, as well as the relative value of each letter, is not quantifiably measurable by someone outside the relationship concerned.

How aspects of letterness such as reciprocity are perceived is contextually specific to each letter-writer’s and each addressee’s particular epistolary relationships. The playing with epistolary boundaries evident in Beryl’s and Zoe Findlay’s letters and their explicit inscription of bodily traces evidence how letter-writers work to create an imaginative sense of co-presence, both in the letter-writer’s temporal present or ‘moment of writing’ or, as in Zoe Findlay’s letter, in recreating or anticipating aspects of co-presence from the past, and in the ‘here and now’ of writing. And Goodlatte’s inscription of the bodily trace draws on and asserts past, present and future aspects of her material presence in a letter despite being co-present with the addressee, arguably creating a sense of presence and a bodily reminder with more impact than a brief face-to-face encounter in those circumstances.

## Conclusion

My discussion of the bodily trace in the letters commented on has looked at the simulacra of presence (Baudrillard, 1994[1981]) and inscriptions of the bodily trace across varying degrees of both literal and perspectival distance in these examples. As I have hopefully demonstrated, these letter-writers inscribed and played with the bodily trace in a number of symbolic, pictorial and metaphoric ways to create a sense of intimacy and presence, and to get around the boundaries of the medium and the communication technology being used.

Epistolary exchanges can occur between letter-writers who are separated both geographically and temporally, occasioning the delayed nature of the epistolary medium to be often taken as definitional; but they can also occur between letter-writers (known or unknown to each other) separated by time but writing from the same geographical location. Examples of this latter type frequently occur in epistolary-like exchanges sprayed on walls, scratched on school-desks and in the margins of books. An exchange of this kind has occurred on the interior-wall of my garden shed which, purchased second-hand, bears the epistolary debate:

[Writer 1] “It’s my shed

[Writer 2] No it’s not

[Writer 1] It’s mine ok!”

In addition, such exchanges can also occur between letter-writers who are temporally co-present at the moment of writing, as with the example of ‘I luv u’ written in steam referred to earlier.

Examples of co-present letters may frequently occur in mediums not conducive to being archived, such as on walls, on bathroom mirrors, and so on, and epistolary theory should acknowledge and encompass this interesting and frequently ignored aspect of ‘letterness’. But *why* should co-present individuals choose the epistolary medium in preference to the spoken word and what are the effects of doing so? The very materiality of the epistolary medium implicitly inscribes the letter-writer’s bodily trace, as demonstrated by Hobhouse’s artful conflation of tearing ‘friends’ letters’ and ‘tearing them into pieces’. Also, the strategic devices of the epistolary medium can have considerable impact and novelty, such as Beryl’s ‘foot wiggling about’. This is perhaps particularly so when they are deployed instead of readily available spoken words, as with Goodlatte’s defence of her injured body, or endearments inscribed in steam. In addition, two people physically co-present may still be figuratively distant (because they have fallen out, or have their minds on other things, for example). Letter-writers may try to reaffirm or remind a co-present but figuratively distant addressee of their bodily trace or presence by using the impact and materiality of an epistolary medium in the given context. Professional tensions occasioned or perceived by Goodlatte in relation to her inability to walk the schoolchildren may have occasioned just this kind of figurative distance between colleagues and



resulted in her desire to repair perceptions of her body's then current deficiencies by using the strategic devices of the epistolary medium.

The fundamental characteristics of letterness I outlined at the start are applicable to all the examples I have discussed, and indeed to all other letters I have worked with so far in my research career. This is because the boundaries of these characteristics are malleable, making the definitional boundaries of 'a letter' complex and porous. Such boundaries can be played with for strategic effect and they are also open to the perception and practices of particular individual correspondents to inscribe their own take on them. It is therefore important to consider such exchanges from the perspectives of those involved, so that the character of an epistolarium should shape theory about letters, rather than vice versa, something I see as core to the concept of the epistolarium. That is, whilst pre-emptive conceptual and theoretical toolkits can be analytically useful if applied in a broad sense, allowing relationship-specific letters and the inter-subjective character of letter-writing to shape conceptualisations allows for a most expansive, intuitive and enriched analysis.

So, in final conclusion, I want to consider what my discussion of letters, the bodily trace and epistolary co-presence adds to the conceptualisation of the epistolarium. The concept of the epistolarium recognises that separation is not a prerequisite condition for letter-writing and includes the entire corpus of an individual's epistolary activity. This paper argues that, in conjunction with the 'simulcra of presence'

(Baudrillard, 1994[1981]), the total epistolary output of an individual or their epistolarium is inextricably and perceptually linked in the minds of the addressee (and future readers) with the body of the writer, and that letter-writers frequently implicitly and explicitly inscribe the bodily trace as a key strategy. This creates a sense of, or reaffirms, the letter-writer's bodily presence; and it is perhaps particularly powerful when letter-writer and addressee are co-present. In situation of co-present letter-writing, the letter can constitute an unexpected medium and create a dual emphasis on physical presence through both literal and bodily physical presence and the implicit (and sometimes explicit) inscription of the bodily trace in the written medium. Writing between co-present individuals requires further analysis. The argument that the value of a gift of an epistolary medium is greater in a context where the spoken word would have been easier is too flippant. The relative values of 'I love you' as a spoken gift and 'I luv u' as a written one are open to individual perception but they are also very different performances of the same expression. What this discussion adds to the conceptualisation of the epistolarium is that, even the broadest definitional boundaries and characteristics of epistolary exchange identified by Stanley (2004, 2009) i.e. their dialogical, perspectival, emergent & sequential elements need to recognise the complexity and importance of the bodily trace.

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## APPENDIX: 'Dear Ones!'

Pretoria  
June 20th 98

Dear Ones!

You will have learnt from our postcards a good deal about our dear one at Maritzburg, but we would like to share with you many other interesting items regarding her & her surroundings, & as we cannot write to each one we are drawing up this general letter to be sent to each one in turn.

Though we should of course not have undertaken the long journey to Maritzburg had the doctor not ~~answered~~ <sup>^informed^</sup> us that death was imminent, we are very thankful that we did so, & think the expense & trouble more than repaid by the accurate knowledge we have gained by our 12 days stay there of dear Mother's physical & mental condition, & of the character methods of the Institution of which she is an inmate.

We had the free run of the Asylum during our stay, & spent the greater part of each day with Mother, without the presence of anyone else, & had as free intercourse with her as if she were in her own home. In addition we were with her 3 or 4 times when the doctor called & examined her pulse etc, & when the matron & nurses attended to address the surface excoriation caused by the tapping, or to attend to her needs of one kind or another, or just to say a kindly loving word to her. Also at Mother's desire quite a number of the other lady & women inmates came in at different times to be introduced to us by her.

During the first days we sat with her in her room, but after she was up & dressed we walked about with her, & sat & chatted in the beautiful sittingroom which ~~so as free to her~~ <sup>^she & two or three other of the other inmates use as freely^</sup> as if it was their own, in which we also had dinner twice with her, or walked out, or sat for two hours amongst the beautiful trees in the grounds.

We thus had every opportunity of becoming acquainted with all the minutiae of her daily life & surroundings & its effects on her; & the result has been to make us deeply grateful & restful about her.

As to her physical condition: according to the Acting Medical Superintendent Dr. R. Brown who we are informed is a man with the highest credentials & Dr. Ward a surgeon of the hospital <sup>^who together examined her^</sup>, she is suffering from ~~dropsy~~ dropsy consequent on kidney disease, which they think is in its turn partly caused by the pressure of a large internal tumour, which her present state of general health does not warrant operating upon. This tumour must be about 10 years growth.

Dr. Brown termed it a malignant tumour at first but moderated the expression <sup>^afterwards^</sup> partially malignant; the dropsy had <sup>^if it exists she feels^</sup> no pain directly from its presence.

<sup>^The dropsy^</sup> increased to such an extent about a month ago that the action of both heart & lungs was seriously impeded, & her sufferings were great & life was in immediate danger. The weight then was 17 stone 6 lbs, & she was increasing in weight a lb per day. Two gallons



of fluid was taken away from her immediately by tapping on May 19th, which together with the slow drainage of the following days reduced her weight amazingly, so that on June the 12th ^although she had already begun to increase in weight again,^ she weighed only 15 stone, ~~having lost~~ ^a difference^ of 34 lbs ~~in the interest~~. The relief has of course been great, heart oppression has ceased & cough well nigh gone. Of pains in the region of the seat of the mischief she has never complained, except of a great pulling down weight when walking

The doctor thinks the dropsy will certainly increase again as the tapping was merely palliative not curative but her present wonderfully improved condition gives ~~every~~ hope that it will be a long period before her weight approaches 17 stone again, & a further tapping becomes necessary. On the length of this first period which cannot at present be foretold, & of the subsequent periods between each tapping, which will ^likely^ become gradually shorter, depends the length of her life.

Dr. Ward says it may be a year or more as he has tapped some patients 35 times, but Dr. Brown is not so hopeful, he says that at present her system is yielding beautifully to the beneficial influences of digitalis ~~which is keeping the dropsy down~~, but he fears that later on it may cease to act

We incline to think that owing to her splendid recuperative powers, good digestion & good appetite, sound sleeping faculties, quiet, ^comfortable,^ restful, life, good hygienic treatment & surroundings, & fresh air she may live even much longer than Dr. Ward surmises. She has certainly astonished Dr. Brown by her wonderful vitality. She herself loves ^her^ physical life more than anything else, & says she will never die if she can help it. It is very pathetic, this clinging of hers to the mere condition of living, & her utter shrinking from the idea of death, & oblivion as to its possible nearness.

Dr. Brown says while tapping is the only way of prolonging her life there are certain dangers connected with the operation such as a possible exhaustion of the heart or a possible peritonitis either of which if occurring might prove fatal. Should such a thing take place we know that it will not be for want of the best medical skill & attention obtainable. Doctor Brown is very attentive & kind to Mother, & she likes him immensely, & trusts him as much as she can trust anyone, & is very obedient to his commands. She seems also to like Dr. Hyslop the Medical Superintendent of the Asylum very much. We regret that he & Mrs. Hyslop were absent on furlough in Europe for a few months, so we did not see them, but everyone in Maritzburg testifies to their wholehearted devotion to their life's work at the Asylum, & the same spirit of loving devotion to the needs of humanity in its weakest & most trying condition, seems to permeate all the staff from highest to lowest.

Exercise in the fresh air is of course good for Mother & she is fond of it, walking as much as possible considering her weight. Our carriage drive with her for 2 or 3 hours turned out a successful experiment physically, & the doctor was so satisfied with it, that he says that he will be glad at any time to allow her to go out in the same way, should any friend of hers send him the necessary money, which is one guinea for an afternoon. The Asylum has no carriage or horses at present, & they have to hire some from the Town.

We were under some hopes before arrival at Maritzburg & during our first days there that the physical betterment caused by the tapping might be found to have the effect of

somewhat restoring her mind to a more normal condition, but alas! we have regretfully & sorrowfully to say that such is not the case.

When we arrived Dr. Brown said "You will find Mrs. Findlay at her very best ^physically & mentally because of the relief which the tapping has given ^the action of the digitalis on her system" ^ & we certainly found his statement correct for the first day or two, & were led to hope that there might be permanent improvement, but alas! it seemed that in proportion as physical ~~health~~ & strength returned in that proportion mental quiet & reasonableness diminished. We hoped for instance that when she knew that 34 lbs of water had been taken from her by tapping, we should be able to prove conclusively to her poor mind that her constant idea of the past 20 years that she is enceinte has been nothing but a delusion. For a day or two she almost seemed willing to accept this as a fact, but then plunged back again into the old delusion, & said that even if they did take so much water away they had only killed the child within her etc. etc. During the operation of tapping she nearly upset the gravity of the doctors by saying "Doctor don't be surprised to see my ten year old boy", "Nurse please take care of the little darling" etc. etc. She said to us the very first day that the doctors took something from her but whether it was water or a baby she could not say etc.

She was glad to see us, but with that absence of depth of feeling which is a marked feature of all her mental sensation whether of like or dislike, joy or sorrow, ease or pain, meeting or parting. We want you dear ones to realize, that the expressions she uses universally in her letters to everybody of "save me, save me", "have mercy on me", "give me a home with you" & the like do not spring from nor indicate any agony of mind whatsoever. She uses these same expressions constantly in conversation with a nonchalant, careless, even smiling face, with so much unreality that they give ^carry^ no weight at all to the listener, whereas when read in her letter the reiteration of them becomes a painful, haunting burden to the reader. I wish you could all have heard her read one of her letters to Maggie to us, & how she laughed that giggling laugh which she always laughs when she is saying or doing something wrong, foolish, or unreadable ^unreal^, as she read her own appeals to Maggie to give her a home ^with her.^ We said to her in that instance "Why do you write what you don't mean?" "Would you go if Maggie fetched you"? When she answered "Perhaps not hey? I might go further & fare worse. I think I'd better stop here". She ^does^ grumble ^every now & then^ about having been put at the Asylum, & wants to know when she may go to her own home; but when we say to her, you know if you went back to Leeuw River you would want to be back here almost at once, she ^would^ says, "Yes, perhaps I would ^hey?^ & three or four times she said even if she got quite well she doesn't know that she wouldn't prefer staying at the Asylum to going anywhere else. "There is already stated no depth, no absolute reality in any of the expressions she uses in speaking or writing. For instance the expressions "if they only wont kill me", "if they only will be kind to me" don't indicate that the "they" be the doctor or matron or nurses are not kind ^or that she thinks them not kind^: On the contrary she always in their presence & in their absence says how very kind & loving they are, but generally winds up with "if only they will continue to be kind & not kill me". This haunting distrust of everyone, especially of those who are kindest & most loving to her has long been a marked feature of her poor disordered mind. One of the kind nurses said quite sorrowfully "She never trusts us Mrs. Stuart." But even this fear least people may become unkind to her in the future in an unreal fear without any depth. She would say to us all of a sudden in quite a careless self assuring way "You & Theo wouldn't kill me, you wouldn't hurt me hey?" I mention these matter so that you dear ones need not be ^over^ weighed & pained by her written talk, as we, or at least Theo, used to

be before we went to Martizburg. The real danger to which she is subject from the dropsy she does not believe in saying she is quite well; &, if you can get her to think & talk of other subjects than her self & her fancied ills & woes, she can talk quite sensibly. She took great interest in an article on Kruger in the Westminster Budget & read it to us, commenting on it en passant quite sensibly.

The doctors says that her mental derangement belongs to the peculiar type called the sane insane, which is particularly trying to those who have the care of such patients, far more so than in the care of those who are violent, maniacal, or idiotic, that one nurse would inevitably break down under the strain.

We asked him whether he thought it possible that one of her daughters could take charge of her outside of the Asylum. His answer was that it would be a cruel & impossible attempt – not even one trained nurse could stand it, he did not think any two nurses could be found to undertake the charge even at a hundred a year each. Even at the Asylum with all its manifold helps he does not allow any one nurse to be exposed to the strain of bearing with the vagaries of such cases for even one day at a time but they are always being changed about ^The Dr. said further “If I had to look after Mrs. Findlay myself for a year I should be a fit subject for an Asylum myself.”^

This opinion of the Medical Superintendent corroborates what Theo & I have felt through all these years, viz, that no one of Mamma’s daughters should ever have been exposed to the torture & strain of taking care of her as they have attempted to do single handed in the past. What is hard to bear up under for a trained nurse is infinitely harder for a daughter.

Even we found the strain of our daily visits for twelve days very heavy to bear, although although dear Mother was loving to us throughout, & we of course laid ourselves out to make her happy, & humoured her wishes in every possible way. She is more like a wilful, obstinate, selfish, spoilt child suffering from delusions with which she will not part, than anything else. She has never been really violent at the Asylum, but now & then gets into a passion & has fits of bad temper.

On the whole her life at the Asylum with its medical regularity, & ^the^ loving, restful yet firm influences to which she has been subjected, together with the material comfort & attendance she has enjoyed have made her mind more quiet & peaceful, & therefore her whole life happier & brighter than she has been anywhere else: just as a wilful child is happiest under kind, wise, judicious control. Another thing which has helped her to be somewhat less self centred & selfish, & therefore more happy than she used to be is her seeing & getting to know & sympathize ~~wh~~ with so many other lives who are really so much more unfortunate than herself. She knows the names & the history (according to their own account of it) of all the inmates in the women’s department, & it was one of her greatest pleasures to tell us all about them, & in order to please her we went round with her to be introduced to all of them. There are three or four whose cases are somewhat similar to hers i.e. they are sane insane people, & they are friends, & dine together in the parlour, & you might be an hour with them & not find out that there is anything wrong with their minds, nor do they know or allow that they are anything but sane. But there are others whose derangement of mind is always apparent, & these are the objects of great pity on the part of the first mentioned class. Then there are two or three children & young people who make a deal of brightness in the lives of ^the^ others. It is wonderful to see how God can use the influence of poor people with weak or deranged minds to be a real blessing to one

another. Mother has of course no idea that anything is the matter with her mind ^the Rev. Grey of Pretoria said however that when he visited her she said "It is sad not to have the full powers of one's mind."^ & she combats the others delusions, such as that of one lady who says she has to be hung in two years time. Dear Mother is a general favourite among the inmates, who look up to her & treat her with respect, & will do so even more after our visit. ^She exercises a really good influence in several ways among them, for she is a Christian, & holds fast to her belief in God & Christ & the Holy Spirit, & God's Word & the power of prayer, though even here the want of depth or reality already spoken of manifests itself; & while we were singing together a sweet hymn she would sometimes break in with incongruous words. There is an inmate there whose delusion is chiefly that there is no God, no Christ, no heaven or hell etc. & Mother has to defend the truths of Christianity against her. Mother spends her time in writing, reading, doing needlework for herself, mixing with the inmates, & chatting with them, or with the nurses. She takes a great deal of interest in her dress & dressmaking & as the Doctor said in her presence leads the fashion at the Asylum. She showed us the body of a dress she is just making & also her green velvet dress shot with gilt thread, in which she goes to the concerts & dances, which are held weekly & which the inmates enjoy amazingly.^ As an instance of her influence I may relate that she reproved one lady for snatching a newspaper out of the hands of another who was reading it, & the lady instead of resenting it said "well I apologize" with a curtsy, whereupon my mother rose from her seat & said with queenly grace & gesture "I accept the apology."

There are several girls of the working class who are always ready & pleased to do little things for Mother, & a Zulu girl named Gracie admires her greatly & declares she will accompany Mother if she ^should^ leaves the Asylum. Mother need not mix with the other inmates but she enjoys doing so.

At first some of them used to tease her calling her "Tant Sannie" & "Big Dutch Woman" but her illness touched them & our advent completed the change.

We became general favourites with nurses & inmates & many were the promises ~~even~~ volunteered ^by some of the latter^ to be loving & tender to her for our sakes. The Doctor delighted ~~some~~ ^a few^ of them one day by asking Mother whether she would not like to retain us there & not allow us to get out again. The idea tickled them all immensely. I wish you could all have seen her bright face when speaking to the Doctor about the ^prospective^ drive she said "Must I come back to my prison Doctor?" The remembrance of it cheers our hearts even now. Another brighter picture was when the doctor, & some of the nurses & inmates gathered in a picturesque group around the side door to see us start for our drive, & also inspect an ^Indian^ pedlar's wares, & the Baby of the establishment, a boy of about 9 years of age, who delights in boot blacking, & had managed to smear his face & hands black tumbled into their midst causing dismay & cries of "Bootles Baby."

Mother has almost perfect freedom in the Asylum, the one exception being that the outer door is locked & if she wants to go outside to walk or sit among the trees in the beautiful grounds she has only to ask, & if the weather, & time of day & her health does not hinder she can stay outside for hours, & does so without an attendant. In the women's quarters of the Asylum she is free to walk at anytime, & also without an attendant. She writes & receives letters without inspection. Of course the authorities do not like articles being sent to her at the Asylum which are not needed & which they provide if needed.

As to the Institution itself, it is a perfectly ideal Asylum, as to situation (The Governor declares that it occupies the position that Government House ought to have had), outlook, surroundings, internal arrangements, methods of treatment etc. By keeping a large staff of nurses & attendants a wonderful amount of liberty is ~~granted to~~ ^available for^ the inmates. Everything about the Asylum is spotlessly clean, cheery & bright. The windows of which there are any amount are ordinary windows with no iron bars, only a small wooden arrangement which prevents them from being opened more than about a foot, top & bottom.

Mother now occupies a nice room next to the parlour with lofty walls, & a beautiful large window looking out on the grounds. Her old room was nice enough but faced the yard & there was no view, but Mother says she liked it because it was nearer the other inmates. She likes this one better however. In her bedroom is a nice, wide single bedstead (good linen & 2 beautiful white blankets) a chest of drawers, a marble topped washstand, a neat toilet table, an easy chair, & other chairs & a commode. She has her meals in the parlour, either by herself or with one or two of the others, & is served by one of the sweet, bright, lady nurses. Table linen, silver, crockery, cruet stand all good, & even a vase of flowers to grace the whole. She says they give her very good food, & plenty of it, & certainly what we saw bears out the statement. Good soup every day, (equal to any of my own making), fowls once a week & almost a superabundance of vegetables – one day we had spinach, cauliflower peas & potatoes & the other time turnips, carrots, cabbage & mashed potatoes - & always two kinds of puddings. Mother ^who^ is somewhat of a connoisseur ~~& she~~ says the puddings are always good – genuine articles without stint of butter, milk & eggs. Dinner lasts from 12 to 2 o'clock, Mother's turn coming at about 1 o'clock. For breakfast she has a chop, toast & butter, & tea – since her illness she gets a cup of Bovril also at 11 o'clock. After dinner they have coffee or tea. The evening meal is at 6 o'clock, ~~besides~~ ^when in addition to^ bread & butter, radishes & watercress, they ~~then~~ have either fish, an egg, or a little cold meat. Before going to bed Mother & a few others get a cup of cocoa.

Every Monday evening the inmates have a dance which they look forward to much. Both male & female inmates take part. On Sunday afternoons a minister comes up from Town & has service, which Mother enjoys. The authorities know from us that Mr. Rousseau the Dutch Reformed Minister is her minister, & he will see her once a week & visit her if she gets very ill. Doctor Brown is a very kindly able man, & mother is very fond of him, "too fond perhaps" she says in her old foolish giggling way. The matron Miss Stewart is a ^as^ sweet & yet kindly firm & capable ^a^ gentle ^e^ woman as you could find anywhere in the world.

We really love her & Mother is as fond of her as she can be of anyone whom she has to obey. Miss Stewart has promised me that should dear Mother be dying without one of us there she will lovingly hold her hand & kiss her for us. The nurses are I think exceptionally nice, & kind, & bright, & capable. They are mostly from England. The whole idea of the treatment there seems to be to give as much liberty as possible to the inmates & to make them as happy as possible.

The Institution seems to us just a living exemplification of one of the topmost & most beautiful fruits of Christianity, only possible in this sin & sorrow stricken world because Jesus has lived & taught & died here. People who have never visited such an Asylum as the one at Maritzburg & ascertained the facts in connection with it, have all kinds of terrible & gloomy ideas about the lot of those who dwell as inmates within their walls, as if the Asylums were prisons where harsh restraint is the order of the day; instead of being the

bright, cheery, soothing, restful places they are. If any deranged & disordered minds can be led back to sanity it will be in such places.

The Asylum is situated on a rising spur of one of the beautiful hills surrounding Maritzburg & is about a mile & a half from the town. The outlook is beautiful & scarcely to be beaten in South Africa. An amphitheatre of grassy & wooded hills & vales stretches more than half way round, while on the open side lies the town of Maritzburg with its public buildings & hum of active life, & away in the distance Natal's Table Mountain in the direction of the sea. The grounds are large & the men inmates work principally in the Gardens, while the women do needlework etc. Of course paying patients like Mother are not forced to work at all, & those who do work are not driven.

Every day if the weather permits the women inmates go out for a walk in the grounds, like school girls do. It is a matter of constant regret to Mother that owing to her weight<sup>^</sup> she cannot participate in these walks. On Saturday afternoon there is cricket etc, & the inmates have so strong a team that they play regular matches against elevens from the Town.

Now I think I have told you almost enough about our poor darling, & her surroundings etc. The matron is going to send us a photo of the Asylum, & of a group of herself & the nurses, & when we get them we shall send them the rounds of the family. I trust that what we have written will be comforting as well as interesting to the hearts of all who love Mother.

In conclusion let me say that we think that it would be very nice & a thing which would give our dear one a great deal of pleasure if one or other of those who love her would visit her for a few days, putting up say at the Barrow Green Tea Rooms Hotel where we put up (<sup>^</sup>price<sup>^</sup> 8/6 a day) & going over to the Asylum in a risksha (1/- fare) for a few hours each day & perhaps taking her a drive in a Landau (price one guinea at Birchells)

While there would be no depth of joy at meeting, nor depth of grief at parting on her part (the day we left she chatted brightly up to the last & waved her handkerchief at the window of the sittingroom as long as we were in sight), such a visit would certainly do her good, & be a pleasant remembrance for after days when she has gone home. We would urge any who purpose doing so not to delay too long as her tenure of life is so uncertain.

When death does come to her we have no doubt she will awake to find herself in the Saviour's arms, for even in her weak disordered minds she believes in & clings to Him, & we shall meet her in the resurrection morning with all the clouds & darkness for ever removed from her poor mind & heart.

We had her likeness taken on the afternoon that we took her out for a drive. It was done on a sudden inspiration or thought & therefore she was not as well dressed as she would have liked to have been for likeness taking, & yet she would throw off Maggie's fur cloak which she was wearing on the drive & which would have been swell enough. Theo & I sat with her to ensure a good portrait if possible, & it has not I think turned out badly, though she doesn't care for it much. She didn't want the full face taken when photographed, now she says she wishes the picture had been full face, & that she had had her jaunty little hat instead of a bonnet & a white blouse instead of a dark one. We shall send you each a copy in the course of a few weeks.

We feel that in going to Maritzburg we have been going on behalf of all the members of the family & we are thankful to dear Hudson's liberality which made it possible. We think it was worth the trouble & expenditure & when you have received this letter we hope you will feel so too. Our special duty ends with the writing & sending off of this account of how things are at Maritzburg but we trust that we shall all remember that one of the great pleasures of our dear one's life which will perhaps now be of but short duration is the receiving of kindly friendly letters, & if we cannot go personally to Maritzburg we can at any rate each manage to write her a loving, cheering letter every fortnight or so, telling her news that will interest her. I am dear ones

Yours lovingly  
Katie Stuart

(Copy of letter received from Miss Stewart since this was written)  
N.G.A June 20<sup>th</sup> 98

My dear Mrs Stuart

Thank you so much for your kind letter received this morning.

Mrs Findlay I am glad to say keeps bright & cheerful, out under the trees most of the day, sewing or reading as she feels inclined.

She has been weighed today (Mon) & is 15 st 4 lbs an increase of 4 lbs for the week, which I don't at all like.

I will try & write as often as I can, should Mrs F. get worse you will hear at once, if I possibly can I will write every week.

Will now close with kindest regards to Mr Schreiner & yourself

Very sincerely yours  
K. Stewart

Since dinner Mrs F. has been tidying her boxes, & thinks it will be best for her to go to her old room where all her boxes are – if she can have breakfast in bed! – which she can, but she may change her mind again.  
K.S.